

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
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LITTLE LARIAT —• THE BOY •— WILD HORSE HUNTER; OR, THE DASHING RIDERS OF THE STAKED PLAINS. *By AN OLD SCOUT.* AND OTHER STORIES



Little Lariat swerved aside out of the pathway of the herd and dashed alongside the flying band. He whirled the lasso around his head, and the next instant the long spiral loops were whirling through the air, and the noose fell over the head of the mad stallion.

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Little Lariat, the Boy Wild Horse Hunter

OR, THE DASHING RIDERS OF THE STAKED PLAINS

By AN OLD SCOUT

CHAPTER I.—The Boy Wild Horse Hunter.

"Is he living or dead? Will he ever return, or is my poor, dear father lost to me forever!"

The speaker was a slender, handsome youth of eighteen years. He was standing upon the veranda of a large, low ranch-house near the eastern confines of the Leano Estacado, or great staked plains of Texas. He was clad in the picturesque costume of a ranchman, with a wide hat, flannel shirt, buckskin riding breeches, belted at the waist with a broad leather girdle in which a holster held a revolver, and with Mexican spurs upon the heels of his high riding boots. The youth was Tom Marvel, the only son, and indeed the only offspring of Allen Marvel, the owner of the ranch-house and hundreds of acres of the surrounding prairie, which was once one of the most prosperous horse and cattle ranches in all the Lone Star State.

Because the lad had attained most wonderful skill in the use of the lariat, or lasso, when he was quite small, he had come to be called "Little Lariat" by the ranchmen and wild horse hunters of the great plains, and though he was now a well-grown and manly-looking youth, his sobriquet still clung to him, and as Little Lariat his fame as a lasso thrower and wild horse hunter had spread far and wide. The boy was alone, and the words which he had spoken were but an involuntary utterance, for his thoughts were troubled, and he was oppressed with the gravest apprehensions regarding the unknown fate of his father, who had been absent from the ranch some eight months now, under circumstances which sufficed to awaken the keenest anxiety in the mind of the youth. Through disastrous speculations, into which he had been led by a stock broker of New Orleans, Allen Marvel had become heavily involved in debt, and been compelled to mortgage his ranch; and with no other means of paying the mortgage and saving that property, as a last resort, hoping to retrieve his fortunes, the unfortunate ranchman had gone with a small party of prospectors to the Mexican mountains where great gold finds had been made of late.

But, though the prospecting party had been absent eight months, no news had been received of them by Little Lariat or anyone. And as his father had promised the lad that, if he was alive, he would return within six months' time, Little Lariat was now fearful that his father

and all his comrades had been slain by the hostile Indians or the Mexican outlaws, who haunted the wild trails leading to new gold fields. Little Lariat was looking away to the west as he thought of his absent father, and the scene which lay before him was monotonous but grand—grand from its very monotony, like the ocean—a vast expanse of rolling, green prairie, seemingly as endless as the sea, but with here and there a motte of timber, like scattered islands. Near the ranch-house some herds of cattle and tame horses grazed, attended by a few ranchers.

All at once Little Lariat sighted two distant riders as they came between him and the declining sun, and presently, as they drew nearer, he took up a field-glass from the window-sill, and through it scanned the approaching persons.

"Ah! old Elias Arnold, our nearest neighbor, and his pretty ward—my own sweet Jessica!" said the lad in a moment, as the glass seemed to bring the two riders near.

"They are surely coming here. I wonder if Elias Arnold is coming to trouble me again about the mortgage which he holds upon my father's ranch? He is now my father's greatest creditor, and he has been here frequently of late to ask if I had any news of the absent one," mused the youth, and a look of new apprehension showed upon his bright countenance.

He knew that Elias Arnold had long coveted his father's ranch, and that in times of his urgent need he had loaned him money at exorbitant rates of interest, taking the mortgage as security. And as he was aware that Arnold had, in the first instance, led his father into the speculation which had well-nigh ruined him, he expected the former was even then hoping to secure the Marvel ranch. Hence it was that there was no one whom Little Lariat disliked and distrusted as bitterly as he did sweet Jessica Dudley's guardian. But because he loved the fair young girl who was just a year his junior, as a matter of policy, he had always sought to conceal his dislike for her guardian. By Jessica he knew he was beloved, for she had plighted her troth with him, without the knowledge of Elias Arnold, however, for the latter had always looked with disfavor upon Little Lariat, for he had made no secret of it that he wished his orphan ward to become the bride of one Julian Torrez, a young Mexican of great reputed wealth, who owned a ranch far away in the wilds of the great staked plains.

As they came on at a swift gallop, Elias Arnold and the fair Jessica soon arrived at the ranch-house. As they drew rein, Little Lariat advanced to meet them, and just then he had eyes only for the maid, whom he thought had never seemed more beautiful than at that moment, with her cheeks flushed, and her eyes sparkling as the result of the healthful exercise of a long gallop across the plains. Jessica answered Little Lariat's somewhat impassioned greeting very demurely, and with a sidelong glance of warning at her guardian, who responded in gruff tones to the lad's polite salutation.

"I thought I'd just stop on my way home to ask again if you have yet heard from your father, and to speak about a little matter of business," said Arnold, abruptly.

"There is no news; not a word from him or any of his comrades has reached me since you were here last," answered the lad.

"I thought so, and I suppose you know the mortgage I hold upon this ranch will soon fall due—in fact, in just one month the mortgage will have to be paid. It will then be due and I shall have to collect my money according to law if the cash is not forthcoming, so I thought I would give you due warning. I do not wish anyone to say I have taken advantage of you. I mean to be just and fair, but I must have my own, so you had better try to raise the money."

Little Lariat fancied he saw a gleam of triumph in the hard, gray eyes of the old ranchman which betokened secret rejoicing. But he answered quietly:

"Mr. Arnold, you know it will be impossible for me to raise the money unless my father's hopes are realized, and he yet returns from the Mexican mines with gold sufficient to pay your claims before the mortgage falls due."

"Let us hope Mr. Marvel will return, as you say, by all means," answered Arnold, but to the boy his tones rang false.

"I would like you to grant me an extension of the mortgage," said Little Lariat, for his heart was well-nigh breaking at the thought of losing his old home.

"I'm sorry, but it can't be done. I've debts of my own to pay," replied the other, coldly.

"But only a little time—surely——" began Jessica, urged to speak in his behalf, as she read the face of her boyish lover, when Arnold cut her short, saying sternly:

"This is a matter of business, with which you have no concern."

After that there was nothing more to be said, and Arnold and Jessica almost at once rode away, but Jessica's glances had assured Little Lariat of her sympathy. He watched them out of sight, and then began to pace up and down before the ranch-house with his head bowed and his brows contracted, thinking, as he had vainly done a hundred times of late, of how he could save the dear old ranch, but all in vain. The lad had no mother to consult, for she had died years previously. He felt that he must depend upon himself alone. There was no one from whom he could borrow the needed money. Presently Little Lariat paused in his nervous walk, saying aloud:

"There is but one chance—one hope, and that

is to find father, and that he may have been successful at the Mexican mines. Anyhow, I cannot longer bear this suspense and uncertainty in regard to his fate. I must know the truth. If he has not been slain I am almost certain my father is a prisoner of hostile Indians, or lawless Mexicans. Yes, I will go. I'll take the trail. I'll solve the mystery of the lost prospectors, or share their unknown fate."

His voice rang loud and resolute, and just then a tall, raw-boned man, with a weather-beaten face, keen gray eyes, and hair and beard streaked with white, came around the corner of the ranch-house.

"Hello! That's the talk, boy, but yer speakin' of a mighty dangerous undertakin', an' one which I ain't got the heart ter advise you to set out on," said the man, from the rear of the house, as Little Lariat looked up and saw him.

The speaker was called Mustang Matt, and his costume, which was very similar to that worn by the lad, indicated that he was a plainsman. In truth, he was a professional wild horse hunter, who had long made his headquarters at the Marvel ranch, when not off hunting wild horses with his little band of mustangs. Mustang Matt was a great friend of Little Lariat, and he it was who had taught the lad to use the lasso, until his skill almost excelled that of his master. And on many a wild horse hunt, over the great Texan pampas, Little Lariat had been the comrade of the veteran mustanger.

"I am bound to go! I am determined to solve the mystery of my missing father. Will you go with me, Mustang Matt? Will you help me learn the truth, whatever it may be?" answered Little Lariat.

The wild horse hunter regarded the lad with a look of admiration and affection, but he hesitated over his reply.

"Only think my poor father may be held in terrible captivity. You are his old friend. Can you refuse to go in quest of him!" urged the anxious son.

"No, I can't and I won't! I'll go with ye, boy, and do my best to help you find out the truth about yer father. And if I know the sort of hearts my gang of mustangers have, they'll all jine us!" the horse hunter cried, earnestly.

"Good! Good! We'll start as soon as the necessary preparations can be made. And now—But who is that? Surely the horseman who has just ridden out of the motte by the spring is a stranger!" exclaimed the lad, pointing at a solitary rider of whom he had just caught sight. Mustang Matt shaded his eyes from the light of the hanging sun with his hand, and took a look at the horseman.

"A Mexican! By gum, boy, it's Torrez, the man of the big ranch, away out in the staked plains where the Injuns range!" exclaimed the horse hunter, after a moment of scrutiny.

"I've never met him, but I've heard much of him, and I know he is a friend of Elias Arnold. And, as I have no secrets from you Matt, I don't mind telling you he is my rival for the hand of sweet Jessica Dudley, also that Elias Arnold favors him."

"Well, the greaser is coming here, that's plain."

"What can he want?"

"It won't be long before you find out, I take it."

Mustang Matt was right. In a few moments Torrez, the Mexican, rode up and drew rein. He doffed his sombrero and said to the lad:

"My name is Torrez, and I have come to place a good round sum of ready money in your hands if we can come to terms. In short, I want to buy your famous horse, Lexington, of which I have heard. I will offer you a thousand dollars cash for him."

"Thank you; my horse is not for sale at any price," replied Little Lariat, quietly.

The horse referred to was a noble black steed of famous Southern racing stock, and he was a son of "Old Lexington," the famous running racer. Little Lariat knew he was the fastest horse in Texas. Money could not tempt the boy to part with him.

"Very well. I see there is no use to argue with you, but I had reason to think a thousand dollars might be welcome to you on your way to the poorhouse. Ha, Ha!" sneered Torrez.

"How dare you? You insult me! I'll——" began Little Lariat, but the Mexican dashed away, and his mocking laugh interrupted the lad.

CHAPTER II.—The Wild Horse Hunters at Work.

"Never mind the greaser, he's only mad, 'cause yer would not sell him yer famous hoss. But I'm thinkin', boy, he's a dangerous feller ter have fer an enemy. The hoss hunters who range down country in the neighborhood of his lone ranch, have a good many ugly suspicions about Torrez, as more than one of 'em has told me," said Mustang Matt, as the Mexican rode away.

"Indeed, what do the horse hunters say!" asked Little Lariat.

"Well, they think it's mighty queer that the greaser, Torrez, kin live among the Injuns unmolested, as he does, and they hint pretty broadly that Torrez is in league with the reds. Then, too, the Mexican outlaws, who frequently make raids on the ranches up this way, always go south in the direction o' Torrez's ranch. I shouldn't be surprised ter find out Torrez knows more about the outlaws, who are his countrymen, than an honest man should."

"Yet he is Elias Arnold's friend. I wonder what the bond of sympathy between the Mexican and Jessica's guardian is," answered Little Lariat.

Just then Mustang Matt sighted a man, who was one of his band of Mustangers, as he approached the ranch from the west riding swiftly.

"Hello! There come Hicks, the hoss scout, who's been out looking for mustang signs," exclaimed Matt.

The man alluded to soon rode up.

"I say, pard," said he, as he drew rein, "I've sighted a big drove o' wild mustangs out by the white sand creek. They are feeding south along the creek, an' I tell yer they're a drove worth goin' after."

"All right, Hicks. We'll be after 'em by sunrise. It's no use to pull out to-night," answered Mustang Matt.

"But you promised to go with me to search for my father. I meant that we should start on the morrow," said Little Lariat, quickly.

"Don't think I mean to go back on my promise, boy, fer I don't; but the delay of a day won't matter much, and I don't want to start on the hunt fer yer father till old Jack, one of my men's who's the best trail hunter in Texas, comes in from the settlement. He won't be here afore late ter-morrow. He'll be a great help to us in our search, an' I say we'd better wait fer him an' have a run for the mustangs what Hicks has sighted while we're waitin'," replied Mustang Matt.

"All right! I certainly want to enlist every man who is likely to be of service to us in trailing the lost prospectors," assented the lad.

Mustang Matt's band of wild horse hunters were encamped near the ranch-house, and Matt proposed to Little Lariat that they should ride to his camp.

"You see, I want to sound the men about goin' along with us on our dangerous hunt for the missing ones," said the mustanger.

The lad assented, and, proceeding to a stable, he saddled and bridled his famous horse, and having led him out, mounted and joined Mustang Matt, who had meanwhile mounted his own horse, a wiry mustang. Lexington was a coal black steed and a perfect picture of equine beauty, showing all the points of a thoroughbred. Little Lariat and Mustang Matt soon reached the camp of the wild horse hunters. The band numbered seven men, and when Matt had told them he proposed to go with Little Lariat in search of the boy's father, and asked his comrades to join him, they assented to a man. Little Lariat thanked the rough but kind-hearted men in a voice shaken with emotion. Then Mustang Matt told all hands to be ready for a horse hunt by daylight on the morrow, and the boy said he would accompany the band.

The gray light of a new day was just showing upon the eastern horizon when the start was made. Little Lariat rode at Mustang Matt's side at the head of the band, and the party shaped their course for the distant stream, on whose banks Hicks had sighted the drove of wild mustangs. A four hours' ride at an easy pace brought the party to the white sand creek, and there horse signs were quickly found by the experienced mustangers. They followed the trail down the stream.

Little Lariat knew that upon the staked plains, and throughout the great upland prairies to the north, the mustang attains his full perfection. Here he roams in droves or herds, several hundreds strong, subdivided into bands of thirty or forty mares, each band led by a stallion. A sort of military organization prevails in these herds—all the minor bands owning the leadership of the patriarch stallion of the herd. He feeds a little apart from the rest, and keeps a keen lookout to the leeward of the herd. He trusts to his nostrils to inform him of his enemies to windward. The scent of the mustang is very acute, and he keeps at a respectful distance from human beings. There are some stallions who have left the herd, and live apart in solitude. The cause of this is unknown, but it is a curious

fact that the solitaires are always far superior to those in the herds.

An hour's ride brought Little Lariat and the band of mustangers to a motte, near the stream which they had followed, and at a short distance they saw a herd of probably two hundred wild mustangs quietly feeding. Hicks at once declared this was the herd he had sighted the preceding day. The party halted in the cover of the motte, undiscovered by the herd. They were to the leeward of it, so the wild horses could not scent them. It was a beautiful sight, such as can scarcely be conceived by one who has not seen the Mexican mustang in his native haunts. The mustangs were of all colors. The stallions were either shining, jet-black, snow-white, cream-yellow, or blood-bay; but the mates were striped, speckled and spotted in the most extraordinary manner. Being the descendants of the stock originally brought over by the Spanish conquerors of Mexico, many of these horses retain the delicate muzzles and general build of the Spanish horse, but they have greatly degenerated and seldom exceed fourteen hands in height. They make useful horses when well broken, but they always retain their love of freedom, and will forsake their masters and return to their old haunts when a favorable opportunity presents itself.

"Now then, men, we have got to rely on the lasso to capture some o' them hosses, fer we ain't got time ter walk them down, as is our usual plan," said Mustang Matt, as soon as he and his companions came to a halt in the motte, beyond which no one ventured to show himself.

To a novice the expression, walk them down, would have carried little actual information as to the real meaning of the term employed. The method to which the mustanger alluded was the method which is generally adopted by wild horse hunters. It simply means to follow them persistently until they are completely fagged out and thoroughly subdued. At first sight this plan would seem impossible, for the horse carrying a rider would be certain to be used up, when the riderless, unfettered mustang was comparatively fresh. But the habit of the wild mustang is to keep to a certain range, generally about fifteen or twenty miles in diameter. To this ground they will confine themselves, even when pursued; consequently they will flee more or less in a circle. Knowing this, the horse hunter forms his plans accordingly. When they have reached the stamping ground of the mustangs they make a camp and two of them sally out on horseback, when if they sight a herd, they at once give chase.

For the first hours the hunters have difficulty in keeping their game in sight, but after a time the wild horses, finding their pursuers are not gaining upon them, slacken their speed, and the hunters, instead of trying to run up to them, also slacken theirs. In accordance with their habit, the herd will travel in a circle, round their range, and before the hunters have been many hours in pursuit, they will have arrived in the vicinity of their camp. If not in sight of it, they fire a quick succession of rifle shots, the reports being audible for many miles over the silent plains. This tells the men in camp that a pursued herd is near, and in a moment two

men from the camp gallop in the direction of the shots. They come up with their friends and the tired men and horses go to camp to rest until it is their turn to be called on relief; meanwhile the fresh men carry on the pursuit. This goes on day and night until the herd is completely dead beat, and can be driven like cattle into camp. The few hours of darkness, which constitute a summer night on the plains, is the time when the hunters are most liable to have their game escape them. Instances have been known when herds, nearly exhausted, turned on their pursuers and by means of hoof and teeth attempted to drive them away, but such cases are rare. When Mustang Matt proposed to use the lasso to capture some of the wild horses, Hicks, the horse scout, said:

"The lasso are all right, pard, but to make it serve ye, as you well know, you have got to git a mighty close start an' ride a durn fast horse, or you'll git nothin', onless a colt that can't keep up with the flying herd, so I say I'm fer tryin' creasin'."

"All right, Hicks, you're a dead shot, so you'll stand a chance o' gittin' a hoss or two that way," replied Matt.

Of course he understood all about creasing, which means the hunter with a small bore rifle, having gotten within range, chooses his horse and then aims for the ligament which covers the top of the horse's neck, and if the aim be good, the animal immediately falls stunned to the ground, and generally remains thus for five or ten minutes, so he can then be secured. Little Lariat and all the mustangers save Hicks unslung their horsehair lassoes. But the dead shot got his small bore rifle ready for use. A light fringe of timber ran along the stream in the direction of the wild mustangs, and under cover of it, the hunters advanced from the motte as silently as possible. They had come within rifle range of the herd undetected, when a fine black stallion, which was the leader of the band, came to the water to drink. Instantly Hicks' rifle sprang to his shoulder, and when he was presently in a drinking position, the stallion presented a most favorable mark, being perfectly still, and exposing the full length of his neck. Hicks took a quick aim. Then came the report of his rifle, and the stallion fell.

"Creased as neat as kin be, by gum!" cried Matt.

But the report of the rifle sent the herd away at a furious pace, and leaving Hicks to secure his prize, the lasso men dashed in pursuit of the fleeing animals, swinging their lariats and ready for a cast as soon as they got near the herd. The race was an exciting one, and the speed of Lexington carried Little Lariat ahead of his comrades, and he was the first one to secure one of the wild horses by means of the lasso. The hunt was continued for some time, and six fine animals were captured before the chase was abandoned.

CHAPTER III.—A Message from the Dead.

The mustangers were on their way back to the ranch with the captured horses, when all at once, at no great distance to the west of their

course, as if he had scented them and so taken the alarm, a magnificent snow-white stallion suddenly broke out of a motte and dashed away to the southward. He was alone and evidently one of those stallions who are called "solitaries," because, as previously explained, they have left their herd and live apart in solitude. He was a marvel of equine perfection and beauty. His eyes gleamed like stars, his mane was long and flowing, and his tail almost swept the ground. The head of the pure white steed was very small and tapered away to the muzzle. His ears were small, his neck remarkably arched, and his chest broad and deep, while his legs were models of symmetry.

But it was not the beauty of the solitary stallion that alone caused every eye to become riveted upon him, as he raced away at a rate of speed which no one present had ever seen equaled by a mustang. All saw, with the greatest astonishment, that there was what seemed to be a buckskin surcingle fastened around the body of the magnificent stallion, just back of his shoulders.

"It's no use to try to run that feller with our tired critters, an' I reckon, fer that matter, he'd get away from the best fresh horses on the plains. But what in tarnation is the meanin' o' that surcingle on the wild hoss? That's what gits me!" said Matt.

The entire party had halted, and all were watching the white steed, as he swept on and on in his rocket-like race.

"That's what gits me! The surcingle looks as if it was heavy and padded, an' I reckon it's good eight inches wide. Never seed the like, in the way o' a surcingle, in my time!" answered Hicks.

"The white stallion is evidently now as wild as he ever was, and yet the presence of the remarkable surcingle secured around his body shows that he has been in captivity. Certainly the hand of man must have fastened the surcingle upon him," said Little Lariat.

"That's so, an' I'd give suthin' to know more about that strange stallion. I've roved the staked plains long enough to be pretty sure the white solitary are a stranger of these parts, an' I think he has the look of the mustangs found in Mexico. He looks a little more like a Spanish hoss than our Texan mustangs do," rejoined Matt.

The lone stallion soon passed out of sight, and then the party rode on, but the strange mustang was the subject of much further conversation among the party. They reached the Marvel ranch in due time, and they learned at once that old Jack, the trail hunter, had not yet arrived there. Morning dawned, and still Jack had not come. At an early hour that day Little Lariat rode away from the ranch-house alone, mounted upon his celebrated horse, Lexington. He shaped his course in the direction of Arnold's ranch, and he was going to say good-bye to Jessica, going to see his girlish sweetheart for the last time before he set out upon the dangerous quest, from which he knew it might be that he would never return. There was a ride of twenty-five miles before the lad over the solitary plains with no human habitation to be met with on the way. But the distance was nothing to the dashing young rider of the plains, or to his speedy horse. He pressed on steadily until half the distance to the Arnold ranch was

traversed. Then his route led him through a strange depression in the plains called "the sunken lands." Here there were many thickets and sink holes, the latter being dangerous to the rider who was not on his guard against stumbling into them.

Little Lariat was about in the center of the sunken lands when, all at once, a band of a dozen men—all save one, whom he took to be an Indian, appearing to be Mexicans—burst out of a thicket and surrounded him. But Little Lariat sent Lexington through the ranks of the men who had ambushed him. Then, as adverse fate would have it, the boy's noble horse stumbled into one of the treacherous sink holes. The horse was uninjured. But by the time the lad got the animal on his feet, the party that had lain in wait for him came up. The sink hole was surrounded, and the Mexicans fired a couple of shots, which passed over the lad's head. Then one of the Mexicans called out:

"Senor Americano! If you will give up your horse to us, we'll let you go unharmed."

Just then the lad noted that one member of the band, who seemed to be an Indian, being dressed and painted as a redskin, carried a richly silver-mounted rifle. Instantly Little Lariat recognized the weapon as one which Julian Torrez had carried when he came to his ranch. The lad instantly concluded the seeming Indian was really Torrez in disguise, and he suspected the band's main purpose was to steal the horse he had refused to sell. It was, however, evidently because there was great danger of injuring the horse of the boy that, when in reply to the spokesman of the band, he declined to surrender the animal, the Mexicans refrained from firing at him.

But Little Lariat meant to escape. Lexington was a great leaping horse, and suddenly the lad sent him at the high, steep side of the sink hole. The noble animal shot upward, and alighted upon the plain above. Then, while several bullets whizzed by him, Little Lariat thundered away. He was pursued, but he soon left his enemies out of sight behind him. He was distant but a few miles from Arnold's ranch, when, as he rounded a motte of unusual size, a thrilling sight burst upon his vision. He beheld Jessica Dudley, alone, mounted upon a beautiful bay mustang stallion, riding at full speed toward her guardian's ranch, closely pursued by a herd of a hundred wild horses, led by a powerful black stallion.

"Heavens! The mad stallion! He means to run Jessica down. He seeks a fight with her stallion. He will kill Jessica if he can!" cried the boy, in tones of horror.

He knew the animal, which was leading the wild herd, was known as the most vicious wild horse on the plains. For years he had been the terror of the wild horse hunters, who had hunted him in vain. He was known to have killed three men with teeth and hoof. It was because of his mad, and sometimes unprovoked attacks upon men, that the vicious animal had won the title of "the mad stallion."

The mad stallion was gaining upon Jessica, and his herd thundered close behind him. Little Lariat shouted to Jessica:

"I'll try to save you!"

Then he uncoiled his lasso and sent the great running horse which he bestrode on like the wind. He skirted the flank of the mustang herd, passed all but the mad stallion, and was rapidly closing up on him, swinging his lasso, when Jessica's horse stumbled and fell. In a moment or so it seemed the mad stallion would rush upon her, and in their headlong career the great herd would trample the girl and her horse to death. But suddenly Little Lariat swerved aside out of the pathway of the herd, and the next instant the long spiral loops were whirling through the air, and the noose fell over the head of the mad stallion. Lexington settled back, and the vicious mustang was thrown. Throwing free the end of the lasso which he held, Little Lariat dashed on to Jessica, and stooping, he caught her up on his saddle just as she regained her feet unhurt by the fall of her horse. Then away he raced, while, checked by the fall of their leader, the wild herd came to a halt.

Little Lariat rode on with Jessica, and he soon told her that he was about to start in quest of his father. When they had arrived near Arnold's ranch a tender scene of parting ensued between the young lovers, and then taking with him the sweet assurance that Jessica would be true to him the lad rode homeward. He gave the sunken lands a wide berth and reached his home in safety. Mustang Matt met him on his arrival and he told his old friend all. Meantime Jack, the trail hunter, had arrived at the ranch, and early on the following morning, leaving the ranch in charge of his trusty herders, Little Lariat and the band of wild horse hunters rode away to begin the search for the lad's father. They shaped their course for the Mexican border, and during the first day no incident of importance occurred, but on the second day, when Little Lariat had scouted for some distance out of sight of his comrades, he came to a low range of rocky hills, and presently he discovered a human skeleton upon the earth under a rocky wall of soft sandstone. Bits of a man's clothing strewn about told the wolves had been there. The boy was about to ride away when his glance fell upon a rude tracing on the rocks underneath which the skeleton lay. He drew near and soon read the following instruction, which had been traced upon the soft rock, evidently with the point of a knife:

"I am dying alone of wounds given me by the Indians. I was riding a white stallion, which is almost as wild as when I captured him, when I fell from his back, too weak to ride further. The stallion ran away, carrying with him a treasure belt in the form of a buckskin surcingle, which I had buckled around his body. It is filled with gold from the Mexico mines, and I bequeath it to my son, Thomas Marvel.

"ALLAN MARVEL."

The grief which Little Lariat experienced almost overpowered him, but he knew the mystery of the white stallion with the buckskin surcingle was solved. And then and there he determined to hunt that wild horse until he had captured him and recovered his father's gold. He was moving away, when he caught sight of some fresh footprints before the rocks.

"Ha! Someone has been here since the shower of an hour ago ceased," said he, with his eyes fixed upon the rude earth. "Yes, a man has lately stood where he could not fail to see the writing on the rocks," he added.

Just then a little gravel rattled down from the ledge, and as Little Lariat glanced up with a start, he saw a swarthy human face peering down at him from behind a leveled rifle.

CHAPTER IV.—The White Hermit of the Plains.

As Little Lariat discovered the man who was crouching on the ledge, with rifle leveled at him, he instantly threw himself along the off side of the horse, with one foot thrown over the saddle, and sent the spirited steed forward. Lexington gave one tremendous bound, and then darted onward at a swift gallop. At the instant when the boy rider dropped along the side of his horse, Indian fashion, the man on the ledge fired at him. But the swift change which the lad made in his position was his salvation. The bullet discharged by the swarthy-visaged rascal whizzed harmlessly over the back of the great black horse. Sending back glances to see if the man on the ledge attempted pursuit, the youth saw the fellow had disappeared. And a moment subsequently, through an opening in the rocks, he reappeared well mounted, and at the head of a band of six wild-looking riders, all of whom were attired in the picturesque garb of Mexicans.

Little Lariat fancied those men were a part of the same gang, which had ambused him, while he was on the way to Arnold's ranch. But of this he was not quite certain. As the band of Mexicans came on in swift pursuit of him, the lad assumed an erect position in the saddle, and continuing to glance backward, he assured himself that Julian Torrez, his Mexican rival, was not a member of the party. His keen and searching glances, however, gave him the assurance that one of the pursuers at least had been with the party who had ambushed him. This man had a frightfully scarred visage, as if some time his face had been fearfully cut and slashed with a knife, and of course it was because of this hideous disfigurement that Little Lariat recognized him. Thrilling ideas occurred to him, with the recollection of the fact that he strongly suspected the seeming Indian, who carried a silver-mounted rifle, like the one which Julian Torrez had with him at the ranch, and who was with the ambushing party, was really Torrez, cleverly disguised. And he began to think perhaps his father had received his fatal wound at the hands of Indian allies in the service of Torrez. This idea was strengthened in his mind as he thought of what Mustang Matt had told him in regard to the suspicious of the wild horse hunters—that Torrez was secretly in league with the hostile Indians.

Continuing his flight, Little Lariat shaped his course in the direction of the motte of timber, at a distance of some ten miles to the southward, in which, before he became separated from them to follow a mustang, he had heard the wild horse

hunters say they should go into camp for the night. The Mexicans urged their mustangs on at their best speed, seemingly determined to run the fleeing lad down if possible. But the thoroughbred which the latter bestrode so far outclassed the animals ridden by the pursuers, in point of speed, that he soon left the mustang riders far behind, and at length, evidently concluding that further pursuit was useless, the Mexicans turned about and began to retrace their course. Little Lariat then allowed his horse to moderate his pace but he kept on toward the motte at an easy gait.

When his recent pursuers had been out of sight for some little time, the young mustanger all at once saw a solitary rider in the distance. The lone horseman appeared directly in the course which the youth was following. They rapidly approached each other, and when he was near enough to enable the lad to make out his face and figure distinctly, the youth saw the horseman was a person of strange appearance. And at once, with a thrill of surprise and curiosity, he became convinced that he was almost face to face with the man who was a living mystery of the great Llano Estacado, or "staked plains."

"The white hermit of the plains!" he exclaimed.

The wild horse hunters for months back had much to say about a lone white man who wandered upon the great plains seemingly without an object, who always sought to avoid all men, and who, like a new Ishmael, made his dwelling place afar from the haunts of his fellow beings, it was supposed, since he never came to the settlements or visited any of the outlying ranches of the white men. For want of any other name by which to distinguish this strange, wandering recluse of the vast plains, the wild horse hunters had come to call him "the white hermit." It was because Mustang Matt, who had met the lone wanderer far from the haunts of civilization on several occasions, had given him a description of him that Little Lariat recognized the solitary, as he rode toward him.

He was mounted upon a handsome black mustang stallion, and he was attired in the buckskin garments of a trapper, with fringed Indian leggings and moccasins as a part of his dress. A wide sombrero shaded his face, which was dark and weather-beaten, and long, white hair fell upon his shoulders. He wore a heavy beard, which was also white, and which fell low upon his broad bosom. A pair of dark eyes which, because of their keenness and brilliancy, gave a suggestion of youth, which his white hair and beard contradicted, looked out from beneath beetling brows. His frame was massive, and proclaimed that he possessed great strength. He carried a rifle slung upon his shoulders, and the belt weapons of a plainsman—knife and revolvers—were supported by the broad leather girdle which encircled his waist.

Taken altogether the appearance of the white hermit was remarkable and imposing. Little Lariat had never heard that the wandering recluse had ever manifested any unfriendliness toward the men who had encountered him on the plains. But for all that the lad did not mean to be caught napping if the stranger should now meditate hostile conduct, and so he held his rifle ready to cover the strange rider upon the instant.

Suddenly the white hermit drew rein, and saluting the youth in military fashion, said:

"Are you not called Little Lariat?"

Of course the boy was astonished at this, for he could not imagine how the unknown recluse of the plains came to correctly guess his identity. But he answered promptly:

"Yes. That's what I'm usually called. May I ask who you are, for I'm certain we have never met before?"

"I am a man without a name, without a country, without a home. But of myself I will not talk," the other replied, in a deep, sad voice.

While he spoke his brilliant dark eyes were fixed upon the bright and open countenance of the lad. The look was a searching one, and Little Lariat felt the plains' hermit was seeking to read something of his character.

"Boy," the stranger went on, while the lad remained silent, knowing not what reply to make to his surprising statement, "am I correct in thinking that you live at a ranch not far from the home of one Elias Arnold?"

"Yes," the youth wonderingly assented.

"Can you tell me if a Mexican called Torrez—Julian Torrez—ever visits the ranch of Elias Arnold?" the stranger further questioned.

"Yes, I know Julian Torrez visits Elias Arnold occasionally."

"Thank you; you have answered my questions in a friendly way, and now in return for your kindness I will tell you of a certain discovery which I have made which I presume will prove of the greatest importance to you."

The speaker paused, and Little Lariat stared at him, suspensefully interested.

"Yesterday, some miles to the northwest of our present position, I came upon a grewsome thing under a rocky ledge. It was the skeleton of a man, and upon a rock just above where the bones lay I saw a message, carved as with a knife, and signed with the name Allen Marvel. The rock-carved words were evidently traced with the hope that a knowledge of them might reach you," continued the solitary.

"I have read the message traced upon the rocks. I know the secret those words reveal!" cried Little Lariat.

"Then I need explain nothing further in regard to the tracing, and now, for I must immediately leave you, let me warn you that others beside you and I have read the message on the rock, and I also warn you, as you value your life, and hope ever to capture the white mustang that carries the belt of gold, to beware of Julian Torrez, the Mexican!" said the plains' wanderer, impressively.

"Do you mean that Torrez knows the secret of the gold-laden mustang—that he will seek to capture it and secure my inheritance?" demanded the lad.

"Yes. The Mexican is ruled by the spirit of avarice—the thirst for gold is his dominant passion. Your life, and the lives of all who are with you, seeking for the mustang with the burden of gold, the Mexican will not allow to stand between him and the treasure."

"Ah! Then I foresee the trail of the white mustang is likely to prove one of peril for me and all with me. But the danger shall not deter me. I will hunt the mustang with the gold-laden

surcingle until I have run him down, and nothing save death shall drive me from the trail. I am working to save my old home—the dear place of my childhood—my mother's grave! I must and will have the gold which my father brought from the Mexican mines!"

"Bravely spoken. I wish you success, and should we ever meet again, count on me as a friend!" rejoined the plains' hermit.

Then the two parted and pursued their devious ways. Little Lariat soon reached the camp of the mustangers. Little Lariat imparted the news to Matt that his father was dead, and told his experience since he had left camp, and of his meeting the white hermit, and what the man had told him about Torrez. They talked for a while longer and then turned it for the night. About midnight a party of riders approached the camp of the mustangers. Shortly four of the riders separated from the rest and approached the horses of the mustangers. Then a wild shout was heard and the mustangers' horses were seen to be stampeding away. Instantly the mustangers were awake and on their feet with their rifles in hand. But they saw that their horses had been driven away, but could not perceive the villains who had done it.

"We can't run them down on foot, so let them go," said Matt.

"Let me see if I can't bring Lexington to me," said Little Lariat, and he uttered a shrill whistle. At the first sound of it Lexington wheeled about and came back toward the motte, the other mustangs following him. Lexington trotted up to Little Lariat, and the mustangers were able to secure their own steeds, and quiet the herd of wild mustangs. The horse hunters were up early the next morning and after breakfast set out to find the white mustang with the surcingle. Towards evening, as Matt and Little Lariat were a considerable distance in advance of the other herders, they came across a war party of Comanches, who immediately gave chase.

After a long chase it was seen that Matt's horse was giving out. Little Lariat made him mount behind him, and it was not long before our friends were again with the mustangers, while the Comanches took the back trail.

Night came and it found the horse hunters not far from the place when Little Lariat and Matt had met the rest of the band. The party now went into camp. In the morning they resumed their way toward the hills. They came to the place where the remains of Little Lariat's father had met his death. But the tracing on the rock had been obliterated by some instrument. All now went to work and Little Lariat's father's remains were soon beneath the ground. Then all mounted and resumed their way to capture the white mustang. At nightfall a camp was made. But just before dark two wolves were sighted some two miles away. Nothing was said at the time about it, but the two wolves were a pair of Indians disguised in wolf skins with the heads attached.

CHAPTER V.—The White Hermit in Torrez's Camp.

When the Indian "wolves" scampered away, as one of the mustangers fired at them, they pro-

ceeded southward, running on their hands and feet, and imitating the movements of real wolves with surprising fidelity. But when they had gone for a distance well beyond the range of the vision of the mustangers, the two crafty red scouts arose, threw off the wolf skins which they had so cleverly worn, and carrying them, ran swiftly on until they arrived at a motte which could not be sighted from the camp of the mustangers. Among the moss-laden trees of this little timber tract they found the camp of the band of Mexicans, led by Julian Torrez. And with the Mexicans were the Comanches who had pursued Little Lariat and Mustang Matt the preceding day. Torrez greeted the arrival of the two Indian scouts with an exclamation of satisfaction, and he made haste to question them.

"Well, braves," said he, "have you seen anything of the white boy and the mustang hunters with him?"

"Wah! Big Bear and Running Wolf scouted to the north as the white chief said, and in our wolf skins we sighted the white boy and the mustang hunters, answered one of the Indians, in good English.

"Good! Have you located the night camp of the party?" questioned Torrez, eagerly.

"Ugh! Yes! But the palefaces saw us and took us for real wolves. One of them fired at us, but we ran, untouched by the bullet. They still think we were real wolves. Big Bear and Running Wolf can lead the white chief to the camp of the white boy," was the reply of the Indian spokesman.

"That is well. We are now in force sufficient to overwhelm the mustangers. To-night we will fall upon them and not one must escape. All must be slain. I believe they are already convinced that I am in league with the Indians, and as they know my band attempted to stampede their mustangs, none of the party must live to return to the settlements to tell the story," said Torrez, turning and addressing a Mexican with a frightfully scarred face.

"Yes," he answered, "for if any of the mustangers live to go back to the ranches and the settlements, they will denounce you, and the chances are they'll bring the Texas Rangers to your ranch to punish you. Then, too, even if that was not done you would never again dare venture to the border ranches or visit the nearby settlements."

"Right, Gomez! Every consideration impels me to exterminate the men who have it in their power to betray my secrets to the authorities of Texas. And besides, you know I hate the white boy, Little Lariat, as my successful rival. Ha! If the four Indians who have gone to do my bidding at the home of Jessica Dudley are successful, the beauty of the border will soon be in my power," said Torrez.

"Ha! I think I see it all now. You have decided not to buy the girl, but at one bold stroke to secure her, and make it appear she was abducted by the Indians, so concealing the fact that you were in any way concerned in the affair."

"Quite right, Gomez. But you have not guessed all my plan. It's a very uncomfortable thing to know that there is one who holds a terrible secret of yours over your head like a sword to

destroy you. Elias Arnold stands in that relation to me, and while he lives I do not feel that I am safe. Then, too, I am tired of paying hush money."

"You do not mean that the Indians whom you sent to the Arnold ranch——" began Gomez.

But Torrez hastily interrupted him, saying:

"I mean that I shall not be at all surprised if my Indian allies bring the scalp of Elias Arnold back with them when they return from his ranch!"

"Bravo! You are a man after my own heart! Ah, not since I rode with Jurez, the bold outlaw of the Rio Grande, have I met one who pleases me as you do, Senor Captaine," cried the scarred Mexican in unfeigned admiration, as he doffed his sombrero before his villainous chief.

Torrez smiled. His vanity has tickled. It gratified him to be likened to Jurez, the outlaw, who was one of the most murderous villains of the Southwest in his time.

"But now to plan our night attack upon the mustangers," said Torrez.

Then he called up the two Indians who had sauntered away to the main band, and who had been with the others out of earshot of Gomez and himself, while they conversed. When the red scouts approached, Torrez said:

"Now, Big Bear, describe the situation of the night camp of the mustangers."

The Indian did so.

"Excellent. With my combined force of Mexicans and Indians I'll form a circle and approach the motte occupied by the mustangers from all sides at once," said Torrez, when the Indian had spoken.

"We'll start so as to strike the camp of Little Lariat's party shortly after midnight," he added, and Gomez signified his approval of the plan.

But at that moment his face suddenly paled, and his eyes became fixed in a wild stare at a point beyond his immediate companions. He tried to speak, but though his mouth opened for a moment, his voice refused to come. Then at last he cried out:

"Look there! The ghost of the dead Americano! The shadow that has haunted me of late!"

Torrez's companion glanced in the direction in which he stared in such a frightened manner, even before he spoke the last words, and they were just in time to see the face of a white man, with long white hair and beard, disappear among the long, curtain-like masses of trailing moss which hung from the low branches of an adjacent tree. The campfires of the band but imperfectly lighted up the grove; the shadows fell where the strange face vanished.

"After him!" cried Gomez.

With the two Indians and Torrez, he bounded to the moss-festooned tree under which the strange man had vanished. They plunged in beyond the trailing moss, and searched everywhere for the intruder. The only men of the party, both Mexicans and Indians, joined in the search, which did not end until all were satisfied that the stranger was not to be found. When the vain search was finally abandoned, Gomez stepped aloof from the other and signaled his chief to join him. Torrez did so, and then Gomez said:

"I think the white-haired and white-bearded

stranger is the unknown wanderer of the plains, of whom the Indians and some of our own men have told us. I have heard that the mustangers have seen the strange man more than once. I was in a camp of a band of horse hunters from the northern ranches some weeks ago. The men there spoke of a strange white man with white hair, whom they had seen, and who appeared to wander aimlessly. They said the horse hunters had come to call the unknown the white hermit."

"The face I saw to-night was that of a dead man! I am a haunted man! I have looked upon the dead body of that man!" answered Torrez, shuddering.

CHAPTER VI.—A Strange Letter Carrier.

The two Mexicans exchanged but few further remarks in regard to the white hermit, and in due time, having calculated about how long it would take his band to reach the camp of the wild horse hunters, Torrez got the party in motion. The sky had become overcast after darkness fell. The gloom was complete, and this suited the plan of the Mexicans. Under cover of the darkness he hoped he could lead his force of Mexican outlaws and his Indian allies very near the camp of the mustangers undetected. The two Indian scouts who had appeared near the camp of those whom Torrez meant to doom to a swift and violent death acted as the guides of the Mexican's villain's forces. Even on the darkest night Indian scouts, as if endowed with a sort of instinct peculiar to themselves, possess the astonishing faculty of keeping to a direct course.

And the two redskins upon whom Torrez now relied were as well gifted in this singular respect as any member of their tribe. They seemed not in the least troubled by the darkness, but on the contrary they went steadily on and on in the true direction of the camp of Little Lariat and his comrades. At length Big Bear said, as he and Running Wolf halted:

"Camp of palefaces half mile that way."

He addressed Torrez, who, with his lieutenant, Gomez, had ridden up to him, and he pointed into the darkness straight ahead.

"Good! Pass the word to all hands. Bid them spread out in a half circle as they go on from this point, and when the camp of the horse hunters is inside the two ends of our lines, Big Bear, who will scout ahead, shall give us a signal. Then we will close in and encircle the camp. A shot from my pistol shall be the signal for the charge," said Torrez to Gomez, who promptly passed the order along.

"The howl, like cry of wolf, shall be Big Bear's signal," said the Indian of that name.

And his words were repeated through the band. Then the party went on. Great care was taken to make no sound. The turf was thick and soft. The hoofs of the mustangs made no noise as they fell upon it, for the bands advanced at a walk after the halt was made. Soon the long-drawn howl of a wolf was heard from a short distance ahead. Knowing this was Big Bear's signal, the party which had disposed their ranks according to the order of Torrez, began to close in. The two ends of the half circle met. Still

there was no alarm from the motte, in which the Indian scouts had located the night camp of the wild horse hunters. And now, of course, the motte was inside the circle, which the Mexicans and their Indians allies had formed. It seemed there was no escape for the wild horse hunters, for, as we know, they numbered but nine men all told, and in Torrez's band there were nearly half a hundred men.

Suddenly Torrez discharged his pistol, and as the loud detonation broke the silence of that night of darkness, a chorus of fierce yells rang out from the Indians and Mexicans, and forward they dashed, straight at the motte from all sides. But there was no answering shout, and not a single shot was fired from the little clump of timber in which the Mexicans and Indians expected to massacre the little handful of brave men who had gone into camp there. Astonished at this strange silence upon the part of the wild horse hunters, the Mexicans and the Indians charged pell-mell into the timber, firing as they went. But now we must make known the cause of the strange silence on the part of Little Lariat's party. Some hours after the camp of the mustangers become silent, and all save the sentinels slept, Little Lariat, as he paced his beat as a sentinel at the southern end of the motte, fancied he heard stealthy footsteps. He listened intently. And he presently became convinced that someone was stealing toward him through the darkness from the open plains to the southward of his position. He at once raised his rifle and held it ready for instant use.

The sounds of a stealthy approach drew nearer, and soon a light flashed in the darkness a few yards away, and it disclosed to him the figure of a man—a white man—of commanding presence, with long white hair and beard. Little Lariat saw the light which had suddenly flashed up in the gloom came from a lantern in the hand of the man whom he instantly recognized as the strange wanderer of the plains, whom the mustangers called the white hermit. The latter advanced quickly, saying:

"Fear not; I come to you as a friend!"

Little Lariat lowered his weapon at once, and the strange man reached his side. Then he said hastily:

"I come from the camp of Torrez and his band of Mexicans and Indians which outnumbers your party five to one. They are camped some miles south of here, and two Indians who prowled near this motte just at nightfall, disguised in the skins of gray wolves, discovered your party and brought Torrez the news that you are camped here."

"And do they mean to attack us?" cried the lad.

"Yes; Torrez means to surround the motte during the night, and suddenly attack your camp from all sides. He has said that he means you shall all be slain," answered the white hermit.

"Then there is but one course for us to follow. We must immediately break camp and seek safety for the time at least in flight," said Little Lariat, excitedly.

"Precisely so. Now lose no time in alarming your companions," replied the unknown.

Having thus spoken, he suddenly extinguished the light of his lantern and glided away into the

darkness without another word. Little Lariat hastened to rouse his companions, and to repeat what the strange wanderer had told him. The camp was hastily broken, and mounting, the wild horse hunters rode swiftly and silently away to the northward. They had been gone from the motte more than an hour before Torrez's band arrived there.

For some hours the mustangers pressed on. But finally, when it was near morning, they again went into camp. This time they halted in a fringe of timber beside a small stream. When the dawn came the mustangers anxiously surveyed the plains. But they saw nothing of their enemies. Suddenly, however, a startling discovery was made. As the party all stood looking about from the edge of the timber, a bay mustang, all saddled and bridled, came in sight from among the trees father down the stream. The animal had evidently scented the mustangs of the party, and it came on toward Little Lariat and his companions. The lad determined to capture the riderless steed, which was evidently a runaway. Hastily mounting his horse, while he made known his design to his friends, he dashed out of the timber straight towards the approaching mustang, and in a few moments he had the runaway safely lassoed and brought to a standstill.

All hands gathered about the captured mustang and presently, as Little Lariat examined the saddle and the trappings upon the animal, he discovered a folded paper in an empty holster made to hold a pistol. Opening the paper and glancing at it, he saw some lines of writing to which the name Burton Rodgers was signed. Then he cried out, excitedly:

"Here is a letter from Burton Rodgers, one of the men who went with my poor father to the Mexican mines!"

CHAPTER VII.—Old Jack Goes On a Dangerous Mission.

The letter which Little Lariat found in the holster on the saddle of the riderless mustang, and which he read aloud to his companions, was as follows:

"To Anyone Who May Find This:

"I, Burton Rodgers, believe myself to be the only surviving member of the party of prospectors led by Allen Marvel. We discovered rich gold caves in the mountains of Mexico, and, having gathered much wealth, we were on our way to our homes, on the northeastern borders of the Staked Plains, when we were attacked on the plains named by a large force of Indians and Mexicans, and I was the only one of the party captured. The others, I believe, were all massacred. A Mexican, who had joined our party some days previously, deserted us the day before the attack, and I think he led the Indians and the Mexicans to attack us. The fellow had evidently learned our secret that we were laden with gold from mines which we had discovered, and I am held a prisoner at a lone ranch near the southern end of the Staked Plains because my captors hope to compel me to reveal the location of the mine which we found. I have succeeded in inducing a beautiful half-breed girl,

who lives at this ranch, to try to send this letter to the settlements to the north or to the home of Allen Marvel, and I beg that in case this letter should reach friends they will come to my rescue,

Hastily,
"Burton Rodgers."

The comrades of Little Lariat listened with eager interest to the reading of the letter, and many were the exclamations of surprise and indignation which they uttered.

"I reckon, men," said Mustang Matt, as soon as the reading of the letter was concluded, "we may be pretty certain that it is on the lone ranch of Julian Torrez that Burton Rodgers is held a prisoner."

"Yes. That is almost a foregone conclusion, I should say, and yet there is, of course, a bare chance that such is not the fact. But anyhow, we cannot turn a deaf ear to the appeal of my father's poor comrade," answered the boy.

"No. That we cannot! But I reckon, boy, if we leave off hunting for the white mustang with the surcingle of gold now, the chances are Torrez, who is undoubtedly on the same hunt, will stand a good chance to beat us and capture the white mustang," rejoined Matt.

"That's so, pard," put in old Jack, the trail hunter. "An' anyhow, I reckon, if Rodgers are really at Torrez's ranch, we can't hope to rescue him by going at the job openly. You kin make up yer mind ther Mex has left a strong force ter guard his ranch."

"You are no doubt right. We must not now give up the hunt for the white mustang, and yet something must be done in behalf of Burton Rodgers. What shall it be?" said Little Lariat.

"I'll tell ye what I have in mind, pards, and if so be you are of my way o' thinkin', the question o' whether it are Torrez's ranch that Rodgers is at or not kin be settled," said old Jack.

"What's yer plan, Jack? Let's hear it, pard," Matt answered.

"It's jest this ere: I hev been ter Torrez's ranch onct er twict, an' I kin find the place agin, so, if you say so, I'll make a scout alone ter the greaser's place, an' make sure by spyin' about there, if Rodgers are there. If so, maybe I kin work some game to git him off by myself. But if I can't I'll come back and let ye know what I find out, an' then we kin lay our plans according."

"Good! ... like yer plan, Jack, old pard, an' if any man among us kin succeed in finding out what we want to know, I reckon you're the party," said Matt.

"Yes. Jack has hit upon a good plan, and while he is away we'll keep on looking for the white mustang," Little Lariat coincided.

"It will be two days, at the least, afore I kin git back from the greaser's ranch, if so be I git back at all, an' I've got to know where to find ye then," old Jack answered.

"That's so, and suppose we say we'll be at the ledge, where we buried the remains o' poor Allen Marvel, the day after to-morrow," said Matt.

"That will do. If I ain't there day after to-morrow, do ye leave at least one man there, to wait two days longer fer me, an' in course he'll know where to find the rest o' ye," replied old Jack.

"All right! It shall be as you say," assented Matt.

"But when four days from this mornin' have gone by, an' I ain't come back, you kin make up your minds that I ain't comin'. You understand?" old Jack went on.

"Yes. If you have not come back when four days have elapsed, then we are to conclude you have either been slain or captured," Little Lariat replied.

"Tht's it, boy."

"Waal, it's no use o' tellin' you to look sharp, old pard, fer you can give all of us points on scoutin' an' spyin' in an enemy's country, an' I reckon you'll come back all right if any man alive kin," said Matt.

"I hope so, pard, fer though I ain't quite as young as I mought be, I hev got a good deal o' longin' to stick to this here lower world yit a while, an' when I hev to go to the happy huntin' grounds I'd a heap rather not be sent there by a greaser or a redskin. Howsomever, there's no need o' more talk, the thing are decided on, and I reckon I might as well be off," replied the old trail hunter.

He then tightened the girths of his mustang, examined his weapons carefully, and having packed a knapsack with food for his journey, he shook hands with his comrades all round, and bidding them a cheerful good-by, rode away in a southerly course.

Then Matt and the others watched old Jack until his solitary figure faded from their sight upon the deserted plains far away in the distance. Although the wild horse hunters had thus far vainly searched the country in the neighborhood without discovering the white mustang, or indeed seeing any wild horses, Mustang Mall still adhered to his idea that it was probable the white mustang would range over some certain area in the vicinity, which would not, according to the known habits of the wild mustang, exceed fifteen or twenty miles in diameter, as he had already said. But when old Jack had passed out of sight the mustanger chief said to his companions:

"In course the thing is possible that the white mustang may have made for the stamping grounds from which he came in the fust place, an' as you know he has the look of a mustang from old Mexico, he may not stop for long until he gets across the Rio Grande. But, even if he set out for his old home, hein' a stallion, the chances are if he should fall in with a herd a' mares he'd jine them, an' so travel with them over the range. Now, I propose we put in the day scoutin' herabouts fer him, at the same time, in course, keepin' a sharp lookout fer the greasers and the redskins."

Of course, all agreed that this was the proper thing to do, and accordingly they picketed the captured mustang in the timber beside the stream, and also left some of their camping outfit there, meaning to make their camp there again that night. In order to make the quest the more close and certain without the necessity for all hands to go over the same territory, it was agreed they should ride in couples. And each couple was to take a given part of the territory to be searched. By the departure of old Jack the original party was reduced to eight men, in-

cluding Little Lariat. And so there were four couples to ride in quest of the white mustang that day. Little Lariat and Mustang Matt rode in company, and the day was well-nigh spent when they struck the trail of a small herd of mustangs, where the earth was nude and soft beside a stream at which the herd had evidently stopped to drink. The finding of this evidence of a herd of wild mustangs was joyfully received by Little Lariat. As soon as the trail was sighted he and Mustang Matt drew rein. And the latter at once dismounted, saying:

"I must have a close look at these tracks."

The experienced wild horse hunters proceeded to examine the hoofmarks of the mustangs attentively, and Little Lariat watched him anxiously.

"What do you make out?" the lad cried, while Matt was still regarding the tracks closely.

"That the mustangs hev been here since noon. If they had been here earlier the tracks would have been dry. As it is, some of them are quite moist. Now, if the wild horses had only left a trail on the thick turf, we should know, of course, which way to go after them. But as there is no trail ter foller, we hev got to fall back on what we know about the habits o' the critters. Because they always look fer water in the cool of the evening, I take it the herd that has been here will strike this same stream agin at along about sunset or later. Now, on the bare ground here we see the tracks o' the animals point south as they left the creek. So we'll take it for granted they went south. Then it follers they will come to the stream fer a drink somewhere south of here. An' so we'll go downstream until nightfall," explained Mustang Matt, and he and Little Lariat rode on without further delay.

They rode on and finally came upon the herd of wild mares. And behold, there among them was the white stallion with the surcingle still around him. He appeared to be the leader of the herd. Matt thought that now was the time to get near enough to the white mustang to capture him. But suddenly the stallion and herd of mares sniffed with their heads in the air. Then the stallion galloped away, followed by the herd.

"They must have got a scent of us," said Matt.

"Yes, that is what happened," answered Little Lariat.

"I'll follow the herd," said Matt. "You go back to the others. And when the horses come back towards our companions I'll blow my whistle and someone can come out and relieve me."

This plan was carried out. After waiting several hours Matt's whistle was heard from, and Little Lariat and a mustanger named Hicks jumped into the saddle and rode away. In a short time they joined Matt. Then while Little Lariat and Hicks followed after the herd Matt went into the camp to get some rest. In a little while Hicks horse became disabled and he was forced to go back to the camp while Little Lariat followed the herd alone. After going several miles Little Lariat perceived in the gloom four Indians a little ahead of the herd, and they had another horse which they were leading, upon the back of which appeared to be a muffled figure. They passed off the trail presently and Little Lariat did not see them again and shortly went back to camp. We must now return to old Jack, who

had gone on his mission to Torrez's ranch. Nearing the ranch, he left his horse and proceeded on foot and soon reached the stockade wall. He climbed over the wall. He came suddenly upon a Mexican who was acting as sentinel. Old Jack put him hors de combat with his clubbed rifle, and then divested him of his clothes and donned them himself, hiding his own clothes in the bushes. Then he carried the Mexican to the porch and pushed the body underneath it, after which he took the Mexican's rifle and paraded up and down as a sentinel. Presently he went to the side door of the house. He tried it and found it unlocked. He pushed it open and stepped into the house. But he had not taken three steps when he came in contact with someone in the darkness. Old Jack's hand came in touch with the unknown's throat and he squeezed hard. The person struggled, but soon old Jack had him as limp as a rag. Jack now struck a match, and he saw by its light that he had strangled a woman—a girl who looked like a half breed.

Old Jack now started in to bring her to, and after a while succeeded. When she was able to speak old Jack succeeded in learning that she was the person who sent Rodgers' letter, and that Rodgers was a prisoner in the house. The girl told old Jack to follow her and she would take him to the dungeons under the house. Jack did so, and soon he was face to face with Rodgers, whom he had known for years. He was chained to the wall. The girl procured a file and Rodgers's chains were soon removed.

But as they were able to depart from the house a large party arrived—Torrez's men. They had found the Mexican under the porch. As it was impossible to leave at present, the girl concealed old Jack in a closet in her room while Rodgers went back to his prison so he would be seen there if the Mexicans searched the house for old Jack. It was not long before Gomez came to Nino's room and asked her to open the door. But she refused, saying she was about to retire. She knew he was looking for the American. Gomez departed. But there were too many men prowling about the premises.

When night came Nino came and told Jack he must go, and she led him safely out of the house and through the gate, when he started for the grove where he had left his mustang, telling the girl he would come back again for the prisoner.

CHAPTER VIII.—The Fall of the White Stallion.

Old Jack mounted the animal and rode swiftly away in the direction he had come. As he proceeded the rain began to fall. But, heedless alike of the darkness and the storm, the scout pressed on, for he was determined to place as great a distance as possible between himself and the Mexicans before the dawn came. Toward morning, when the rain had ceased and the night had grown lighter as he continued his way, the scout discovered a faint light in the distance. He soon decided the light came from a camp-fire which was dying out. Although he had made no discovery to indicate that pursuers were on

his trail, he would have been glad to encounter any party of honest white men.

Thinking that the campfire might mark the site of the place where some band of horse hunters of his own race had halted for the night, old Jack decided to investigate. The campfire was in the direction in which he wished to go, so he knew he would lose little time in seeking to gratify his curiosity in regard to it. When he arrived near the campfire, which was located at the edge of a motte of timber, he drew rein, and having picketed his mustang, he proceeded on foot. Cautiously he drew nearer the fire. And at length he was able to see that a score of Indians were sleeping about it, while too tall warriors stood guard over the camp. Suddenly a female voice reached the hearing of the scout from the camp of the redskins. He sank down upon the earth instantly. Listening intently, he heard the female voice again, and quite plainly heard the woman say:

"Chief, I cannot sleep. The blanket suffocates me. Will you not take it off? Why should you keep it bound over my head now?"

Old Jack gave a start, and of course he was sure the speaker was the female prisoner, muffled in a blanket, who was in the power of the four Indians whom Little Lariat encountered when he was alone, following the mustangs led by the white stallion. The shadows which enveloped the plains were not dispelled to any extent by the light of the campfire. When he heard the Indian, to whom the female captive had spoken, and who was one of the sentinels, make some reply, which he did not distinctly hear, the scout ventured to crawl nearer. Presently he made out the muffled form of the woman whose voice he had heard. She was seated on the further side of the campfire, and while old Jack looked, the chief to whom she had spoken approached her. Then the scout was near enough to hear him say:

"Ugh! Red Crow will take off blanket now. Big white chief say, 'Keep white squaw hidden in it until she well on the way to his ranch.'"

With that the chief drew his hunting knife, and old Jack watched him with the greatest curiosity as he cut the cords which secured the blanket about the person of the female captive. The scout hoped now to see the face of the mysterious prisoner of the Indians. And in this he was not disappointed. The chief presently severed the last one of the cords which held the blanket in place, and then, as he stepped to the fire and stirred it until the blaze leaped up, old Jack suddenly saw the face of the captive as the firelight fell upon her.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the astonished scout, under his breath then. "She is Jessica Dudley!"

It was so. The mysterious captive was indeed Little Lariat's girlish sweetheart, whom the brave lad supposed to be at that moment safe at the ranch of her guardian—Elias Arnold.

"An' so the red varmints mean to take the white gal to Torrez's ranch," decided the scout.

And he thought Little Lariat and Mustang Matt's band of wild horse hunters would now have an incentive to lead them to abandon even the pursuit of the gold-laden white mustang in order to go to the Mexican's ranch, bent upon

accomplishing the rescue of the captive maiden. When day dawned, old Jack had placed a long distance between the camp of Jessica's captors and himself. With the first gleam of daylight in the far eastern sky, old Jack began to scan the plains in every direction with anxious and searching glances. He was gratified when he failed to see any human creature. As far as he could see, the vast plains were deserted by man. But far off to the westward he saw a number of dark objects moving close together. They looked very small, owing to the distance, but the scout knew they were a herd of mustangs. Old Jack pressed on and on, and at last, a short time after mid-day, he approached the timber in which he had left his comrades, and where Mustang Matte had agreed at least one of their number should remain to meet him upon his return. But he saw no one in the timber as he approached, and no shout of welcome greeted him.

In a few moments he cautiously approached the cover. Still all was silence. He began to think he should find the former camp of the mustangers deserted. But he could not think that Mustang Matt had willingly broken his promise to leave at least one of the band there. As the scout reached the site of the late camp of the mustangers, he suddenly drew rein and exclaimed:

"The red devils have been here!"

At that instant he saw the dead body of one of his comrades, a man named Bently. The unfortunate man had been shot to death. And because his scalp had been taken, the scout knew the murderers were Indians. This man had been left to wait for old Jack. At the close of the day of the scout's departure Bently had been sent back from the range, which he had scouted with the others for the herd of the white mustang during the day. The search for the herd had not been successful that day, and Mustang Matt had assembled his man by means of signals sounded on his whistle at nightfall. All save Bently had then gone into camp, where night overtook them. The scout, of course, knew he would now have to scout over the adjacent territory for his friends. And he presently set out to look for them.

Meantime, just before noon that day, far away at the extreme western side of the area, which the mustangers believed the gold-laden mustang and his herd would keep to, the horse hunters were scouting. Suddenly Little Lariat once more sighted the white stallion and his herd. Mustang Matt was the lad's only companion just then, and in a moment they once more started in pursuit of the stallion and his herd. As the white steed galloped by a small motte at the head of the herd, the report of a rifle rang out in the cover and the stallion fell. Then out of the motte dashed half a dozen Mexicans straight for the gold-laden steed.

CHAPTER IX.—The White Stallion Eludes the Mexicans.

"They have creased the white stallion! The bullet was well aimed, and luck is against us this time, boy!" cried Matt (disconsolately).

They pulled up at once, and without heeding

them the Mexicans pressed on toward the fallen steed. But they saw that Torrez was not in the party. The next moment, however, Little Lariat uttered a joyful shout as the fallen steed bounded up. It was then evident that he had been but very slightly creased by the Mexican's bullet, and only momentarily stunned—not enough to render him helpless long enough for the Mexicans to reach him before he regained his feet. The herd of mares halted when the stallion fell, and they surged about him as he bounded up. The surprised and disappointed Mexicans fired at the white stallion as he bounded away. But the gold-laden steed rushed on unscathed. Two mares, who had come between the Mexicans and the stallion, were hit, and they fell. The Mexicans dashed after the fleeing herd, but the latter soon got beyond the range of their rifles.

"Good!" exclaimed Matt then. "They'll never run the white mustang down that way! The only way to get him is to walk him down!"

"We must follow the Mexicans!" cried Little Lariat, decidedly.

"Yes, and I'll try to call our comrades," answered the mustanger.

He sounded his whistle, and the shrill, clear notes echoed over the plain. He knew the sound would travel far over the level prairies. While he and Matt rode on, so as to keep the Mexicans in sight, without closing up the gap between the latter and themselves, Matt continued to sound the whistle from time to time, and in the course of half an hour he saw two small, dark objects appear in motion far away to the east. Just after he called the attention of his boy comrade to these objects, the latter cried, pointing to the north:

"There are two more riders, and they, like those coming from the east, are our friends, I think!"

Matt assented, and sounded his whistle once. After that the approaching horsemen came straight toward the mustanger. Soon he and the boy positively recognized them as their comrades. They overtook Matt and the lad presently, and they were promptly informed of what had last occurred. Then all hands kept on after the Mexicans, who were barely visible in the distance. By the absence of old Jack, the party had been reduced to eight men. And as Bently had been left to await the return of the old scout at the camp in the timber, one of the party whom Matt had hoped to call up by means of his whistle was now missing.

"The greasers cannot trail the herd in the darkness, and I take it they will soon go into camp. Now, I propose we press on, making a detour so as to give the greasers a wide berth and get ahead of them on the course taken by the herd," said Matt, when the night shadows became so gloomy that they could no longer see the Mexicans ahead.

All saw the wisdom of this proposition, and it was acted upon without delay. Matt and Little Lariat led the party westward for a short distance. Then they again proceeded southward. This was the course of the herd when last seen. Since the chase began the wild mustangs had run more or less in a wide circle. Some time later, when he decided the Mexicans had gone into camp when it became too dark to see the quarry

of which they were in pursuit, Matt drew rein. Of course, his followers pulled up directly, and Matt said:

"We may as well go into camp here, but at the first show of daylight we must be on the move looking for the mustangs led by the white stallion. And since we now outnumber the little party of greasers by one man, if they sight us I don't think they'll show fight."

The party then dismounted and picketed their horses. But there was no water of which the animals stood in need at hand, and all knew that in order to enable them to slake their thirst they must find water in the morning. One man stood guard for the first half of the hours of darkness. Then he was relieved. Nothing occurred to disturb the camp during the night. At the first appearance of the dawn the sentinel, who was then on duty, awakened his sleeping comrades, and as the light increased every eye sought the plains, casting searching anxious glances in every direction. But nothing was seen of the band of Mexicans, and the herd of the white mustang was nowhere visible as far as the naked eyes of the knee-sighted horse hunters could penetrate. In the east they saw timber, and it seemed to mark the course of some small stream. So, urged to such a course by the need of the animals after they had eaten a morning meal, the party proceeded toward the timber. As they were approaching it, one of the party sighted a solitary horseman. He was coming from the northwest, and that was the direction of the camp where they had left Bently.

At first the mustangers fancied the approaching man was Bently. But as he drew nearer it was seen that he was in reality old Jack. He uttered a shout, and rode toward the horse hunters at full speed. They halted and waited for him, while they wondered why he was not accompanied by Bently. Old Jack was warmly welcomed when he came up with his friends, and Little Lariat and Matt pressed forward to meet him, and shook hands with him warmly.

Then old Jack told how he had found the dead body of Bently in the grove, and that there was no doubt the unfortunate man had been slain by Indians. After that he related all his adventures and discoveries at the ranch of Torrez. In conclusion the old trail hunter told his friends how he had seen the muffled female captive in the camp of the Indians, and how he had finally plainly seen her face, and recognized her as Jessica Dudley. The intense surprise and consternation which this startling news occasioned Little Lariat may be readily imagined. And the lad and his comrades could not understand why—as old Jack said he was convinced—Torrez should have instigated the abduction of the young girl.

"But Jessica must and shall be saved!" cried Little Lariat, stoutly.

"What is gold to me compared with the safety of Jessica? I will give up the chase of the white mustang. Aye, give up everything, anything to go to the rescue of the imperiled girl who is more than all the world besides to me!" he added.

"That's spoken like a brave lad, and we're all with you heart and hand. But let's consider things a bit. I propose we leave two men to track the white mustang, while the rest of us go

to Torrez's ranch and seek to rescue the gal an' Rodgers by means of some stratagem. But since old Jack failed I reckon we ain't got much show for success," said Matt.

There was some further discussion. Then all hands rode into the timber and watered their horses at a stream which they found. Then lots were drawn, and two men were thus chosen to remain on the trail of the white stallion, to keep track of that elusive animal if possible, while the others went to the Mexican's ranch. Then old Jack acted as guide, and the six who were to go to Torrez's stronghold took leave of their two comrades, who were to remain behind.

CHAPTER X.—Old Jack Stalks a Redskin.

As the party, bent upon resorting to desperate secret methods looking to the rescue of Jessica Dudley, rode on, they discussed many plans, and old Jack was called upon to describe the buildings inclosed within the stockade at the stronghold of the Mexicans. This he did accurately; but still the rescuers could not devise any plan of action which seemed feasible. However, they congratulated themselves that in Nino Raymond and the half-breed boy, called Palo, they had two secret friends in the abode of the enemy. For a time, while the others were advancing various schemes, which upon close analysis were found to be impracticable, old Jack remained silent. Any one observing his weather-beaten countenance closely would have seen that he was preoccupied and engaged in deep thought. The fact was the old trail hunter was racking his brains seeking to devise some plan which held a promise of success in leading to the deliverance of Jessica. At length, when the mid-day halt was made, old Jack said:

"I hev figgered it out that we hev got to wipe out Torrez's ranch in order to git the chance we want, ter snatch ther prisoners outen his clutches. With ther stockade wall and barred doors of the house inside watched an' guarded by ther Mexican Injuns, we stan' no show. But if the greasers hev to bring the prisoners out into a camp on the plains, then we might work the trick to spirit the prisoners away from 'em."

"By gum! That's it, Jack!" cried Matt, with enthusiasm.

"So I say! But tell us your plan in full!" exclaimed Little Lariat.

"Waal, it ain't no great shakes what I've been thinkin' on, an' I ain't takin' no credit ter myself fer bein' smarter than the rest o' ye, but it's my idea ter burn the Mexicans out."

"Hurrah! With the ranch buildin's in ashes, the varmints will have to camp on the plains!" cried Matt, in approving and enthusiastic tones.

"That's it," said Hicks.

"How will you warn the prisoners?" asked the lad.

"Waal, I reckon I shall git inter the stockade in the disguise of an Injun, if so I kin waylay any red varmint an' git his togs. If not, I'll git in somewhat as I did ther last time," answered the old trail hunter.

"Old Jack's plan is the very best one that we kin try, I think, and my name ain't Mustang Matt if we don't git the prisoners off if the

greasers once bring 'em out into a camp on the open plains," said the mustanger chief.

"I think so, too, if the danger that the captives may perish in the flames can be gotten over," assented Little Lariat.

"But I wish to take measures to make the rescue of Jessica and the others a sure thing eventually, even should we fail. And in order to do that, I propose that one of our number take my horse and ride to the settlements for help. Our messenger must bring a large force down upon Torrez's ranch as soon as possible," the lad added.

"A good idea, boy! Lexington can make good time. But the man who goes as our messenger must know the way to Torrez's ranch, so he can lead the force he'll git together at the settlements straight there," rejoined Matt.

"I'll do fer the messenger then, fer I've been ter Torrez's ranch onct," said one of the party—a young fellow named Scott.

And so it was decided. Scott and Little Lariat exchanged horses. Then having been bidden "God Speed" by his comrades, Scott sent the fleet racer, Lexington, away at a fine pace toward the northern settlements.

After the departure of Scott the party pressed on, and in due time, without meeting with any adventure of which mention need be made, they finally arrived at some Indians mounds where they were to wait for Scott and whatever reinforcements he could bring. These mounds were supposed to be the graves of some aboriginal race, and they were scattered about irregularly over an area of several acres. Stunted bushes grew among the great mounds, and a stream of water was near. As the mounds would serve well as a secret camping place, within easy distance of Torrez's ranch, the party decided to camp there and make it the base of their operations against the Mexicans. In a space between the two large mounds in the old Indian burying grounds, where the "open" was completely surrounded by the sides of the mounds and the stunted bushes, the camp of the mustangers was made. Old Jack said he favored this place as a rendezvous, because he knew the superstitious Indians always gave the old graves a wide berth, and he did not think the Mexicans often came there.

Having watered their horses, and then picketed them where they would graze among the mounds without being seen by any one who might pass the area occupied by the old cemetery of the Indians, the party further considered their plans, and while they were talking, one of their number who had been posted on the lookout at the top of one of the mounds, where the bushes concealed him, cried out:

"I say, pards! I see an Injun comin' from the direction of the Mexican's ranch!"

Old Jack thereupon crawled up to the elevated position occupied by the lookout, and peering through the bushes he saw the solitary mounted Indian. The brave rode straight toward the mounds, until he had arrived within a few hundred feet of the outermost one of them. Then he turned his mustang and skirted along the confines of the Indian burying ground, and rode toward a tract of wooded land to the west of the mounds.

"That feller is out arter game, an' I'm goin' ter make him my game if I kin. His togs would jist suit me fer a rig in which to try to git inter the greaser's stockade as an Injun," said old Jack to the lookout.

Then he hastened to rejoin his companions below, and to them he made known his plans. After that he stole away, and his friends soon caught sight of him creeping through the grass in the direction of the timber and was lost to the sight of the horse hunters. An hour elapsed while they watched and waited for old Jack's return. No rifle shot sounded from the timber, and yet old Jack's friends saw no one appear out of the timber, which they supposed he had entered in pursuit of the Indian, until they saw the mounted brave again, as they supposed, as he rode straight toward the mounds. But as he drew nearer, under the feathered head-dress of the seeming Indian rider, they saw and recognized the weather-beaten face of old Jack.

"By gum! old Jack has done fer the redskin, sure as shootin'!" exclaimed Matt then.

CHAPTER XI.—The Scout's Disguise.

Little Lariat and all the mustangers congratulated the old scout upon his success in securing an Indian costume. Old Jack said he meant to go to Torrez's ranch that night disguised as an Indian. But as the redskin, whose war-dress he had captured, was a much taller and larger man than the scout, he had no thought of attempting to pass himself for the dead warrior. On the contrary, old Jack stated that he intended to make the Mexicans and Indians at Torrez's ranch think he was a messenger from the northern branch of the Comanche tribe. That division of the great Indian nation of the southwest had been organizing for open war against the whites for some time, as old Jack knew, whereas the southern Comanches, though hostile to the whites, seemed to hesitate about becoming the allies of their northern brethren in inaugurating a general war. Having alluded to this, old Jack said to his comrades:

"I shall make some changes in the war-dress of the redskin that I wiped out, so his friends won't recognize it, an' I shall paint my face like that of a Northern Comanche. When I go to the ranch of Torrez I'll make a bold bluff—claim to be a messenger from Tonawanka, the great chief of the Northern Comanches."

Then he set to work to alter the Indian war-dress to suit his plan of disguise. When the shades of night began to fall upon the plains old Jack, who had taken a pouch of Indian paint from the body of the Comanche whom he had slain in the timber, proceeded to paint his face like that of a warrior of the Northern Comanches. Exposure had tanned his face until his skin was as dark as that of any Indian. And when he had completed the task of painting, donned the Indian head-dress and the rest of the costume, his companions declared he would pass for "a genuine red" anywhere. Very soon after night-fall the old scout and Little Lariat rode away from the camp among the Indian mounds. They proceeded southward cautiously. And they did

not encounter anyone. At length they arrived at the grove near the ranch of the Mexican, where old Jack had left his mustang on the occasion of his last secret visit.

There they halted. Looking forth from the southern end of the grove they saw the ranch buildings, with lights gleaming in the windows. It was not a lark night. On the contrary, the moon gave light enough to enable them to see objects at some distance plainly.

"Now then, boy," said old Jack, as he and his youthful comrade stood together at the edge of the grove, "I'll go to the ranch on foot. If all goes well with me, and I am taken fer what I shall pretend ter be, look to see me at the gate in the stockade, which you can plainly see from here, with this red handkerchief tied around my throat."

As he spoke he indicated the handkerchief, which was then knotted to the buckskin girdle which he wore.

"I understand. I'll watch the gate," answered Little Lariat.

Then he pressed the old scout's hand and wished him good luck as he stole away. As soon as he came out into the moonlight from the shadows of the grove old Jack went toward the stockade boldly. Little Lariat watched him from the cover. He saw his old comrade reach the gate in the stockade. There he halted. A moment elapsed. Then the gate opened and Little Lariat saw Julian Torrez and two Comanche braves appear in the portal. They seemed to exchange some words with the disguised scout. And they made no hostile demonstration. Presently old Jack entered the stockade. Then the gate was closed.

Little Lariat's observations tended to make him think old Jack had duped Torrez and the Indians. But still the lad remained in the grove. And he eagerly watched the gate in the stockade. Half an hour elapsed. Then the gate opened. In it appeared old Jack and a Comanche warrior. Little Lariat saw with delight that old Jack wore the red handkerchief knotted about his throat.

"Good! He has succeeded! The Indians and the Mexicans have accepted him for a warrior of the Comanches of the north," said the lad to himself.

Then he resolved to remain in the grove until near the dawn of a new day, for he knew it was barely possible the scout might accomplish his purpose at the ranch that very night. Old Jack and the Comanche who appeared with him at the gate in the stockade soon retired out of sight within the inclosure, and the portal was closed. The scout had succeeded beyond his hopes. When he arrived at the gate in the stockade he had been halted and challenged by an Indian sentinel inside the gate, who looked at him through a wicket. Old Jack replied in the Comanche language. He said:

"I am Waupanah, a warrior of the Northern Comanches. I come from the great chief Tonawanka with a message for the white chief and the Southern Comanches."

Then the Comanche opened the gate and said: "Enter, and I will lead you to the white chief and to Flying Cloud, the chief of my band, who is here."

A moment later the disguised scout was ushered into the front room of the ranch house. There he was confronted by Torrez and Flying Cloud. The latter was one of the most blood-thirsty of all the Comanche chiefs, and he was said to be more shrewd and crafty than his fellow chiefs, though none of them were supposed to be lacking in cunning. Flying Cloud and Torrez regarded the disguised white man keenly, as the gate sentinel introduced him in his pretended character. The moment was a critical one for the scout. Old Jack comprehended that this was an ordeal of the greatest danger. And he knew that the keen-eyed chief of the Comanches might penetrate his disguise, but he had less fear of detection by the Mexican. Without waiting for the chief or Torrez to question him, the scout hastened to tell them he had come as a messenger from the great chief Tonawanka, to invite them to join him in attacking the northern settlements of the whites.

And a few moments later the suspense and fear of detection which old Jack experienced gave place to secret exultation in his mind, for what Torrez and the Comanche chief said in reply to his remarks assured him that his disguise had stood the test, and that they had accepted him as a real Indian. After that he was provided with refreshments. A little later he made the excuse, to get the Indian at the gate to open that portal, that he wished to see if he could discern anything under the moonlight of a companion whom he pretended to have become separated from on the way to the "white chief's" ranch. Then it was that he knotted the red handkerchief about his throat.

When the gate was again closed the disguised scout made himself at home among the Indians of Torrez's band, who were encamped in the yard within the stockade. From the Comanches he learned Torrez and the greater part of his band of Indians and Mexicans had arrived at the ranch that afternoon, and that a white squaw had been brought there by Indians under Torrez's orders before he arrived. Old Jack doubted not that the white woman referred to was Jessica Dudley. And, in confirmation of this belief, he saw the face of the white maid at a window of the ranch house a little later.

ranchman. And it was his scalp which Little Lariat saw carried at his belt by one of the Indians, whom he saw with the hidden captive whose identity he did not even suspect.

While Elias Arnold was meeting his terrible fate, Jessica was made a prisoner, and having muffled her in a blanket, the redskins hurried her away. They were all well mounted, and the mustang ridden by the young girl was very speedy. The Indians got clear of the ranch of Elias Arnold, and they struck out upon the great staked plains unpursued.

The white girl experienced the greatest terror and despair. But the Indians did not molest her on the march, and hearing them say she was to be taken to "the great white chief," she began to suspect Torrez was at the bottom of her abduction. And yet she could scarcely reconcile such a thing and the murder of her guardian, with the friendship which seemed to exist between the Mexican and Elias Arnold. As we have shown, Jessica Dudley's Indian captors arrived at Torrez's ranch with her before Torrez came, and it was not until Torrez entered her presence at the ranch house that Jessica really knew he was the instigator of her capture and the murderer of her guardian. Then Torrez coolly informed her that she was his prisoner, and that she should remain such until she became his wife.

"I am in your power, but if the good God will hear my prayers something may yet occur to baffle your villainous plans," answered Jessica.

Torrez laughed sneeringly, and rejoined:

"You need have no hope of rescue. No one can track you here, and if they did, they could not take you from me, unless they had a strong force. But under any circumstances you shall not escape. I swear I will kill you rather than lose you now!"

The Mexican's voice sounded fierce and determined, and the imperilled girl believed he was terribly in earnest. She turned her back upon him, and finding she would not speak again, he went out of her presence and locked the door of the room in which he had found her. It was not long after that when old Jack arrived at the ranch. The scout, having seen Jessica's face at the window, wished to assure her that she had a friend near. But he dared not run the risk of attempting to speak with her unseen. He presently saw Nino, the pretty half-breed girl. And he soon found a chance to speak with her, unseen by any of the Mexicans or Indians. He at once revealed himself to Nino Raymond, and told her of his interest in the fate of the white girl captive; also that he had a small party of friends near, and that he proposed to set fire to the ranch buildings and burn them up, so the Mexicans would be compelled to bring their prisoners out into a camp on the open plains. Nino told the scout that Rodgers, the prospector, who was imprisoned in the dungeon under the house, was getting anxious to be liberated.

Hearing this, old Jack asked Nino to see Rodgers, and help him get out of his cell. If he succeeded the scout would meet him at midnight in the rear of the stable building, he said.

"I promise you I will," replied the half-breed girl.

CHAPTER XII.—The Mexican's Ranch in Flames.

It was true that Jessica Dudley was an inmate of the Mexican's ranch house. The little band of Indians who held her a captive when old Jack crept up to their camp, and saw her face as the blanket in which she had been muffled was removed, had brought Jessica to the ranch. Her capture and the murder of Elias Arnold—for he had been slain by the Indians—had been accomplished in the most daring manner. Jessica and her guardian were out riding on Arnold's ranch when four Indians suddenly appeared out of a clump of timber which they were passing, and surrounded them. Elias Arnold was lassoed and dragged by the neck from the back of his horse. Then one of the savages tomahawked and scalped the unfortunate

Then she volunteered to help old Jack fire the ranch house, and he accepted her proffered assistance. When the Indians slept and only the sentinels—who were all Mexicans, as it happened that night—were wakeful, old Jack found a great can of oil where Nino had placed it outside a rear door of the house. With this he saturated the wall of the dwelling, and then heaped a great mass of firewood, also saturated with oil, against the building. In the stable he sprinkled oil about on the straw, and in a short time he had everything ready to produce a great conflagration when he applied the match. At midnight, according to his agreement with Nino, old Jack was standing in the dark shadows at the rear of the stable awaiting the coming of Rodgers. All at once the scout saw a dark figure gliding from the house toward his position, as he peered around the corner of the stable building. In a moment the advancing man reached old Jack.

He was Rodgers. The scout grasped him by the hand and drew him into the darkest shadows. Rodgers hastened to say that Nino, who had unfastened the cell door for him and led him out of the house, had told him of the plans which old Jack had formed.

"Good! Now, then, we will fire the buildings," the scout said, when Rodgers had spoken.

He gave the prospector some matches, and told him to start the fire in the stable. Then he went to the house and ignited the oil-soaked firewood which he had heaped against the wall. The flames leaped up at once. A high wind was blowing, and the scout knew if the fire once got well started the dwelling was surely doomed. He returned to rear of the stable as soon as he had fired the house. Through the stable door he saw the red flames leaping up among the straw, so he knew Rodgers had done his part. The prospector was waiting where he had first joined old Jack. The latter had previously attached his lasso to the spokes at the top of the stockade wall there, and in a moment or so, by means of the lasso, he and his friend scaled the wall. Then the scout led the way toward the nearby grove swiftly. Rodgers followed, and they soon reached the cover.

Then they paused and looked back. They saw the flames mounting high upon the rear wall of the ranch house, and while they looked the flames burst through the windows of the stable buildings. From this it seemed the fire would spread to the other outbuildings. While the scout and his companions looked at the increasing conflagration a chorus of alarmed yells, which they knew were uttered by the Indians inside the stockade, rang out. Then they heard the shouts of the Mexicans, and so they knew the men of the Mexican's ranch were aroused at last. But they believed it was too late—that that conflagration had gained so much headway that it would be impossible for Torrez's men to combat it successfully. A few moments after old Jack and the prospector reached the edge of the grove, Little Lariat, who still remained in the cover, approached them.

"I saw your signal. But I remained to see if I could be of any use to you later," said the lad to the scout, and then he shook hands with Rodgers and congratulated him upon his escape.

A little later, while the flames mounted high upon the ranch house and the adjacent outbuildings, Torrez and a number of the Mexicans were seen to leave the stockade, and with them Little Lariat saw Jessica Dudley.

CHAPTER XIII.—The Camp of the Mexicans.

The Mexicans and Indians busied themselves with the task of rescuing their mustangs from within the stockade, and they also carried out all the goods belonging to Torrez, which the flames allowed them to reach. Meanwhile Jessica was closely guarded by a dozen of the Mexicans.

When the horses and all the belongings of Torrez that could be saved had been brought outside the stockade, the Mexicans and Indians retired to a safe distance and watched the conflagration until the buildings fell in, and the walls of the stockade, which were made of logs, took fire. Then they set up a few army tents which had been saved, and the furniture and goods of various kinds which had been brought from the burning building were heaped up near by. Soon after the fire was discovered, Torrez had hastened to the cell in which Rodgers, the prospector, had been imprisoned. And when he found the captive had escaped, his surprise and rage may be imagined. He was accompanied to the cell by Gomez, his lieutenant, and to him the outlaw chief stated his conviction that someone who was an inmate of the ranch had unlocked the cell door for Rodgers.

"And," he added, "I believe Rodgers set fire to the house and outbuildings before he fled. Let me find out the traitor and he shall die! But I know not whom to suspect. I might have thought the girl, Nino, had helped Rodgers, but for the fact that she was the first one to give the alarm of fire and so probably saved us."

Meanwhile, from their hiding-place in the grove, old Jack, Little Lariat and Rodgers watched the Mexicans and Indians. When the latter had set up the few army tents, which they had saved, the hidden men saw Jessica Dudley and Nino, the half-breed girl, conducted into one of those shelters. Then several Indians and Mexicans were posted about it, as if Torrez had a suspicion that friends of the prospector, who had escaped, might be near. The night passed, and Little Lariat and his companions found no opportunity to steal into the camp of the enemy to rescue the two girlish captives. When the dawn was almost come, old Jack proposed that they should retire to the camp among the Indian mounds. And he said:

"The chances are, as soon as it's daylight, Torrez will send out Indians scouts to look for the trail of Rodgers. The redskins will be sure to search this grove. I think Torrez will stay in camp near the burnt ranch, an' ter-morrer night I hope we may git a chance to git the two gals away from the greaser."

A little later Little Lariat and his two companions were on their way to the Indian mounds. As they proceeded Rodgers told the story of the massacre of his companions and his own capture in full. And he said the surcingle on the white

stallion contained many thousand dollars' worth of gold which was Allen Marvel's share of the gold taken from the Mexican mines. The trio reached the camp of their friends in safety just at sunrise, and they reported in full what they had done and seen. Rodgers received a warm welcome, and all were hopeful that the next night the captives might be rescued, as the camp on the open plains could be entered secretly much more easily than a stockade-guarded ranch house.

Sentinels were posted on the tops of the mounds about the camp, and the only fear the horse hunters had was that they might be discovered by some of Torrez's Indian scouts. But the day passed, and none of the enemy came near the Indian graves. Meanwhile, that morning there had been a new arrival at the camp of Torrez. Not long after day dawned the inmates of the camp sighted a solitary horseman coming from the south. They quickly made out that he was a white man, and as he approached nearer it was seen that he was dressed in the costume of a Mexican ranchero. This observation led Torrez to suppose the stranger was a friend. He came on fearlessly, and presently he reached the camp. While Torrez advanced to speak with him, all noted that the stranger was well mounted, and that he carried a large pack upon his saddle. It was also seen that he was a man of commanding presence, and that he wore a huge black beard and mustachios, while his eyes were protected by large blue glass spectacles. The stranger said when he had saluted Torrez:

"Senor, I am called Pierre Diaz, and I am a traveling trader, visiting the distant ranches of Texas and New Mexico for the purpose of barter. I carry such goods and notions in my pack as the ladies cannot buy save in the large towns. One Marcio, a ranchero over the border, directed me to come to the ranch of one Julian Torrez in this vicinity, saying he thought I might find sale for some of my goods."

"I am Julian Torrez, and I know Marcio well. Yonder blackened ruins are all that remain of my ranch buildings. They were burned last night. You are welcome to my camp, as a countryman. But you come at a poor time to sell goods," answered Torrez.

There was some further conversation, and the Mexican was given refreshments, and he soon made himself at home in the camp. That night he remained in the camp. At about nine o'clock Little Lariat and old Jack left the camp of the horse hunters, accompanied by Mustang Matt. They were resolved to attempt the rescue of Jessica and Nino during the hours of darkness, if possible. They proceeded cautiously, and they soon reached the grove near the camp of the banded Mexicans and Indians. There they halted, and from the edge of the timber watched the camp of the outlaws. They saw the numerous campfires of the Mexicans and their Indian allies, and although the night was quite dark, the light of the fires enabled Little Lariat and old Jack to point out to Matt the tent which they believed Jessica and the half-breed girl occupied. And they saw six men were posted about the camp to act as sentinels during the night. They noted the several positions of the night guards, and watched and waited for the inmates to fall asleep. At length it became silent. The campfires burned

low, and no one could be seen stirring in the camp. But still, of course, the sentinels remained at their posts, and they appeared to be alert and vigilant.

"In an hour's time the moon will have entirely disappeared, and though the clouds make it rather dark now, when the moon has gone it will be pitch dark," said Matt anon.

"Yes, and then we'll try to steal into the camp," replied old Jack.

And while they waited for the disappearance of the moon, events were taking place in the camp of the outlaws which must now be recorded. Jessica Dudley and Nino occupied the tent to which the Mexicans had conducted them the preceding night. The two girls had made friends and exchanged confidences, and that evening when the camp became silent they were wakeful. Nino had told Jessica of old Jack's promise to return with friends to rescue her. The two captives were hopeful that the night would bring them deliverance. Jessica had not as yet been molested by Torrez, but she feared the outcome of every hour that she remained in his power. Not long after all the inmates of the camp seemed to sleep, the two young girls suddenly heard the sound of stealthy footsteps, and the succeeding moment the tent flap was drawn aside, and in the vague light they saw the tall form of the Mexican trader who had remained in the camp, and whom they had observed watching them several times during the day. Before the surprised and alarmed girls could utter a word, the Mexican trader stepped into the tent and let the flap fall behind him, as he said in a half whisper:

"Fear not, I come as a friend. I am not what I seem, and I mean to rescue you. Very soon the night will be completely dark; then I will try to lead you from the camp. You have friends near, but they are a small party, and they can do nothing openly to assist you."

CHAPTER XIV.—Conclusion.

Perhaps an hour after the man who had come to Torrez's camp as a Mexican trader so unexpectedly, made his appearance at the tent occupied by Jessica Dudley and the half-breed girl, Little Lariat and old Jack stole out of the nearby grove, and made their way cautiously toward the silent camp of the outlaws. Mustang Matt remained in the grove with the mustangs belonging to himself and his two companions.

The moon had disappeared, and the night had become very dark. The boy wild horse hunter and the veteran scout had proceeded but a short distance from the grove when they both halted. They had caught the sound of approaching footsteps. In breathless silence they listened, and heard several persons moving by in the darkness near their positions. And as the invisible persons passed them, they heard a man's voice. His tones were very low, but his close proximity enabled them to catch his words. He said:

"In the grove nearby I hope to find some of the mustangers who are your friends, miss."

"Ha! there is something familiar about that

voice," whispered Little Lariat in the ear of old Jack.

And even as he spoke he heard a female voice say in reply to the words of the unseen man:

"You have led us safely out of the camp of the Mexicans. Oh, Heaven grant we may reach the friends of whom you have told us!"

"Jessica's voice! Thank God she has found a friend! Oh, this is almost too good to be true!" whispered Little Lariat, in excitement, and at once he glided after the unseen persons, and old Jack followed.

"It is I—Little Lariat! Fear not," he said, in cautious tones, as he heard those whom he could not see quickening their pace, as if they had caught the sound of his footsteps and were alarmed.

A low, joyful exclamation in the voice of Jessica instantly reached the hearing of the lad, and the next moment he was at the side of the maid whom he had meant to risk his life to save. In the darkness he could see the shadowy outlines of a tall man and a girl who were Jessica's companions. The reunited lovers were for a moment clasped in each other's arms, and then Jessica said, indicating the tall man and the girl, who were her companions:

"This man is a Mexican trader who has rescued me and my girl companion, who is called Nino Raymond."

"How can I thank you, sir?" said Little Lariat, grasping the hand of the stranger.

"Never mind thanks now. Let us hasten on," said the stranger.

Little Lariat took Jessica's hand, and the little party went on to the grove. There they met Mustang Matt. He was delighted at the turn which events had taken, and he declared the Mexican trader deserved to be an American. The two girls were mounted upon the mustangs of Little Lariat and Matt, and riding his own animal, old Jack led the way toward the camp among the Indian mounds. Little Lariat and Matt ran beside their mounted companions. The camp of the mustangers was soon reached, and the party heard no sounds from the Mexicans to indicate that the escape of the two girls had been discovered. There was a scene of great rejoicing at the camp of the wild horse hunters upon the arrival of the rescued ones, and all hands joined in making the stranger—the Mexican trader—the hero of the hour. But he hastened to say:

"I had the incentive of a father's love to urge me on to rescue my daughter. I am really the man who, in disguise, has long wandered upon these plains, and men came to call me the white hermit. But the truth is I am Howard Raymond, the father of Nino, whom she has mourned as dead."

"I know your voice now! Oh, father! father! this is the happiest moment of my life!" cried the beautiful half-breed girl, as the pretended Mexican folded her to his heart.

A little later he told his strange story to the daughter whom he had wrested from the power of the outlaws, and all the mustangers listened with interest. While he talked the mustangers were getting ready to break camp, and a little later they were going northward as swiftly as

possible. They pressed on until dawn, fearful of pursuit. When the first light of the new day came the little band was alarmed by the discovery of a long line of swiftly-moving objects in the distance to the south, and they were soon convinced that those objects were the Mexicans and Indians on their trail.

But scarcely had this alarming discovery been made when, to the northward, they sighted a great troop of horsemen, who soon became so plainly visible that they could see they were United States cavalrymen. Soon Little Lariat recognized his noble horse, Lexington, at the head of the troop, and saw that Scott, the messenger whom he had sent for assistance, bestrode the splendid steed. The cavalry force soon came up, and they were received with shouts and cheers. Scott had barely time to tell that he had met the troopers on their way to one of the forts on the Texas plains, when the command dashed away after Torrez's band. We may add here that an engagement, in which Torrez and many of his men were slain, ensued, and only a few of the Mexicans and Indians escaped. After the battle, Jessica and Nino, accompanied by the father of the latter and an escort, proceeded to the settlement to the north.

But Little Lariat and the horse hunters once more set out to find the white mustang laden with the treasure from the Mexican mines. Space will not permit us to dwell long upon the adventures which befell the boy mustanger and his companions on the trail of the white stallion. But it may be briefly stated that they found the two men whom they had left on the range of the mustangs, of whose herd the gold-laden steed had made himself the leader, and they led them on the track of the herd. A long chase ensued. But finally the herd was walked down, and at last the white stallion was captured unharmed, and Little Lariat secured the surcingle of gold.

Later, with the gold which had so long been carried by the white mustang, Little Lariat paid off the mortgage which Elias Arnold had held against his ranch home, and which had fallen to the murdered man's heirs. Some years later the young rancher brought a beautiful bride to his old home, and of course she was Jessica. The white stallion became the pet of the ranch as the favorite steed of the young bride.

Next week's issue will contain "THE BOY RAILROAD KING; OR, WORKING HIS WAY TO THE TOP."

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"Doctor, I've tried everything and I can't get to sleep," complained the voice at the other end of the telephone. "Can't you do something for me?" "Yes," said the doctor, kindly. "Just hold the wire and I'll sing you a lullaby."

CURRENT NEWS

NEW FISH AT HONOLULU

A fish of a species hitherto unknown, caught by a Japanese fisherman thirty miles offshore at a depth of 1,200 feet, is on exhibition in Honolulu, T. H.

It weighs 150 pounds, is flat and almost circular. Silver is the chief coloring of its body, with its fins and snout of scarlet and the dorsel, about eighteen inches long, spotted with white. The head is mottled with dark gray and black and the eyes are round and about four inches in diameter.

BARBER USES RADIO TELEPHONE TO AMUSE WAITING CUSTOMERS.

Patrons of a big barber shop in Virginia Park the other day were electrified, so to speak, when sounds of music, interspersed with a masculine voice making announcements of race results and other "newsy" items, floated through the shop from nowhere. Ernest Gist, the proprietor, told customers he had installed a wireless radio telephone, so those waiting for the call of "next" might not be bored.

COMES BACK TO JAIL

When a man breaks out of jail it is usually with the intention of staying away from it, but the rule does not apply to Strother Colley of this county, who escaped from the Mason County jail, Point Pleasant, W. Va., some months ago. He

was sentenced to a four months' term for sending a threatening letter through the mails.

Sheriff John F. Lewis was aroused from his bed by the ringing of the jail doorbell. He responded and was surprised to find Colley standing there. Colley said he had come back to eat.

He had wandered over several States since leaving the jail, had been unable to obtain employment and was also unable to get "three squares" a day. Colley had three months of his sentence to serve, and he figured it was easier to eat by staying in jail than roaming the country.

WATCHFUL DOG SHEPHERD

Last fall O. L. Bernice drove his flocks of sheep down from the grazing lands in the Mount Adams forest reserve to winter quarters near White Salmon, Wash.

In a fog he lost forty head and a dog was missing. No trace of the wanderers was found in a week's diligent search.

One day recently the dog turned up at the home with thirty-nine sheep, all but one having been wintered somewhere under the guidance of the watchful dumb shepherd.

Sheepmen are at a loss to account for the fact that the dog was able to keep off predatory animals, for during the winter wolves, cougars and coyotes prey continually on sheep.

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Chased To China

— OR —

HOW DAN SAVED HIS GOOD NAME

By WILLIAM WADE

(A SERIAL STORY)

CHAPTER IX.—(Continued.)

One anxious moment passed, and then they heard the bolt at the top of the door slide back in its groove.

"Now the other one," commanded Dan.

A little more slack was allowed on the rope and the sheet, but the tension was maintained just the same, and the two boys were on the alert for the first treacherous movement. Slowly they paid out the rope and the sheet until they reckoned that the man had slack enough to reach the bolt and then they stood firm.

There was a momentary hesitation, as though the man thought that this was his chance to make an effort for liberty, and Dan tightened up just a trifle on his end of the sheet.

That was enough.

Back went the lower bolt.

"Now shorten up on him, Dick," said Dan, "and walk forward and turn the handle."

Dick did so, walking forward with a circular movement that wound the rope around his body and brought him up against the door in such a manner that only the thickness of the panels separated him and Bill.

Dan held his end of the sheet taut while Dick seized the handle of the door and turned it.

It was a great relief to the boys when the door slowly swung inward with the burly form of Bill held fast to the outside.

"Hold him snug, Dick!" cried Dan, and then he rushed forward, caught Bill by the back of the neck, spoke to his partner, and when Dick unwound himself Dan plucked the rascal from the door and threw him on the floor.

Then he put his foot on him.

"Tie him up, Dick," he said, and a moment later the rope was employed to bind the arms and legs of the rascal.

Bill was a powerfully-built man of middle age, with a face that plainly indicated a criminal nature.

He glared at the boys with a mixture of rage and admiration.

"You're two clever coves," he said.

The boys grinned at him.

"Now, Bill," sharply said Dick, "you will not have any chance of spending that five thousand we were talking about, but we will give you a chance of keeping out of jail at the present time. Unless you want us to hand you over to the police you've got to give us straight answers to questions we shall ask you. Do you hear what I am saying?"

"Yes."

"All right. What has become of Stephen Carrington?"

"Who?"

"Stephen Carrington."

"Never heard of him."

"If your memory doesn't serve you better you'll find yourself in the hands of the police."

"Can't help it."

The two boys looked at the man on the floor and made up their minds that he was telling the truth. It dawned upon them that probably this man was only a blind tool who was used by the villanous telegrapher, and in whom he did not confide.

"Well," put in Dan, "tell us where we can find Parsons, and we'll let up on you."

"Don't know any Parsons," said Bill, with an equal appearance of sincerity.

"The man you work for," added Dick.

"Can't tell you anything more about him, except that I see him every week or two when he comes here and pays me."

And whether the man did not know much more, which the boys began to believe, or whether he was a deep fellow who could lie with a truthful face, the young fellows could get no information out of him, and as time was an important factor to them, they left him lying on the floor and rushed out of the room. They ran in and out of all the rooms in the house, finding but two in any degree furnished, the one that they had occupied and the room below in which Carrington and Parsons had sat drinking and talking.

"Let's get away from here as lively as possible," said Dan. "Stephen Carrington plainly indicated in his talk with Parsons that he was going to get away from Chicago, and for all we know he may be hundreds of miles distant at the present time. Let us have a bite at the nearest restaurant, for I'm hungry enough to eat a horse with his hide and hoofs on, and then we'll go straight to Rederton's agency and lay the entire matter before the chief."

They left the house, closing the front door behind them, and they had not taken six steps when Dick pointed with his hand and said:

"Look!"

Dan looked up and saw what Dick was pointing at. It was the alley that ran between the house they had just left and the house next to it, and Dan saw that it was closed to the public by gates at the front and rear, so that the chance of their note, which they could see lying on the ground, getting to the police, were slim, indeed.

"Yes, it was a well planned prison," said Dan, "but we are out of it, and I hope that we'll soon square accounts with Mr. Parsons."

"Which probably is not his name," said Dick, "but as we know his occupation and where he works, it will not be difficult to get him."

Both boys were very hungry, and made straight for the nearest restaurant, where they put away a good meal, and then Dick looked at his watch.

"Nine o'clock," he said, "and I think that is the hour that Rederton reaches his office."

(To be continued)

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ITEMS OF INTEREST

PRIZE FOR COON SKIN

George Horton and Frank Freeman have received \$50 as a prize for a coon skin shipped by them. Freeman and Horton, who hunt entirely for the sport, have well trained hounds. They do their hunting at night along the Palouse River, the prize coon having been killed near the mouth of Rock Creek, almost seven miles from Winona, Wash. During this winter they have killed twenty-nine coons and one lynx.

DECLINES \$1,000 FOR \$5 BILL

J. Bailey, a rancher near Maryville, Cal., refused to sell a \$5 bill for \$1,000. The note bears the date of Dec. 21, 1839, and is an heirloom of the Bailey family. It is printed on one side only. It was signed on the back by the President and Cashier of the City Trust and Banking Company of New York City. It is of the bank note variety, and was issued during the time when the "National Bank" fight was on in Congress. Notes of this variety are very rare, declare collectors.

GREAT FLOCKS KILLED

Gordon, Neb., was treated to an unusual occurrence when the community was visited by great flocks of birds of an unknown kind. At times the flocks were so dense that the sun scarcely could shine through. They were a trifle smaller than the ordinary sparrow, and the air literally was filled with them. Toward evening it began to snow and the birds flew lower and lower until they annoyed the people walking on the street. They seemed dazed and somewhat helpless.

In the morning the ground was covered with their dead bodies. They covered the sidewalks, streets and lawns. Some were killed by flying against buildings, but there were hundreds of them lying on the ground in open spaces with no buildings near.

SEEKING SUNKEN TREASURE

Gold and other valuable metals estimated to be worth \$5,000,000 lost by the sinking of steamships during the great war are to be sought by treasure hunting companies now being organized in this and other countries, according to dispatches received in Washington.

Treasure hunting is spreading over the United States, England and other European countries just as it has swept the world after every great conflict.

Officials of the War and Navy Departments are being deluged with requests for information as to the location of vessels sunk by submarines. The public records of the Customs Service of the United States, England and France are being scrutinized to determine which of the submarines and vessels carried gold and other valuables worth salvage expenses.

In France one treasure hunting corporation is soliciting the public to subscribe to stock on the grounds that the venture may bring in a profit that will reach into thousands of per cent. of gain. In Washington Government officials gen-

erally are not optimistic concerning the chances of success of the treasure hunting companies.

Probably the biggest treasure was lost with the Lusitania which was reported to have nearly \$1,000,000 in gold aboard when she was torpedoed. The Lusitania lies too deep to permit divers to work on her at the present stage of development of most salvage apparatus, officials say.

Engineers and inventors are working to perfect new and unusual diving apparatus, the records of the patent office show. Superdiving bells are planned to cover the treasure which lies too deep for the ordinary methods of salvage. One inventor recently experimented with a steel diving suit to protect the diver from the terrific pressure of the water at the Lusitania's level.

An English salvaging company is at work with suction pumps on the wreck of a Spanish vessel that sank off the coast of Scotland during the invasion of the Armada.

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Beset By Three Desperate Burglars

By KIT CLYDE

In the fall of 1866 I was employed as a clerk in a general store at a cross-roads in Southern Indiana. The store, a church and a blacksmith shop, with two residences, made up the buildings, and the families of the merchant and the blacksmith were the only residents. The country about was thickly settled up, however, and trade was always good. Before the merchant engaged me he announced that I would have to sleep in the store o' nights, and that unless I had pluck enough to defend the place against marauders he did not want me at any price. He showed me a shotgun, a revolver and a spring gun, which were used, or on hand to be used, to defend the place, and the windows were protected with stout blinds and the doors by double locks. The close of the war had drifted a bad population into Indiana. The highways were full of tramps, and there were hundreds of men who had determined to make a living by some other means than labor. Several attempts had been made to rob the store, and it had come to that pass that no clerk wished to sleep there alone.

The merchant seemed satisfied with the answers I gave him, and on a certain Monday morning I went to work. The same night a store about four miles away was broken into and robbed and the clerk seriously wounded. Two nights later three horses were stolen in our neighborhood. At the end of the week a farmer who was on his way home from our store was robbed on the highway. If I had not been a light sleeper from habit, these occurrences would have tended to prevent too lengthy dreams as I lay in my little bedroom at the front of the second story. The revolver was always placed under my pillow, and the shotgun stood within reach. The spring gun was set about midway of the lower floor. It was a double-barreled shotgun, each barrel containing a big charge of buckshot, and the man who kicked the string and discharged the weapon would never know what hurt him.

It did not seem possible that any one could break into the store without arousing me. There was no door to my room, and after the people in the neighborhood had gone to bed I could hear the slightest noise in the store. I had looked the place over for a weak spot, and had failed to find it, but my own confidence came near proving my destruction. I should have told you, in describing the store, that just over the spot where we set the spring gun was an opening through which we hoisted and lowered such good as were stored for a time on the second floor. When not in use this opening was covered by a trapdoor. Toward evening, on the tenth day of my clerkship, I hoisted up a lot of pails and tubs, and had just finished when trade became so brisk that I was called to wait upon customers. Later on I saw that I had left the trap-door open, and I said to myself that I would let it go until I went to bed. The store had the only burglar-proof safe for miles around, and it was customary for the farm-

er who had a hundred dollars or so to leave it with us. He received an envelope in which to inclose it, and he could take out and put in as he liked. On this evening four or five farmers came in to deposit, and, as I afterward figured up, we had about \$1,500 in the safe.

There were two strange faces in the crowd that evening. One belonged to a roughly-dressed, evil-eyed man, who announced himself as a drover, and the other to a professional tramp. I gave the latter a piece of tobacco and some crackers and cheese and he soon went away, and we were so busy up to 8 o'clock that I did not give the drover much attention. When we came to shut up the store he had gone from my mind altogether. We counted up the cash, made some changes in the day book, and it was about 10 o'clock when the merchant left. I was tired out, and I took a candle and made the circuit of the store, set the spring gun and went to bed. I had to pass within six feet of the trap-door as I went to my room, but I did not see it. It was a rather chilly night in October, and we had no fires yet, and as I got under the blankets the warmth was so grateful that I soon fell asleep. It was the first night I had gone to bed without thinking of robbers and wondering how I should act in case they came in. I did not know when I fell asleep. I suddenly found myself half upright in bed, and there was an echo in the store, as if the fall of something had aroused me. It was 1 o'clock, and I had been asleep almost three hours. Leaning on my elbow, I strained my ears to catch the slightest sound, and after a minute I heard a movement downstairs. While I could not say what it was, a sort of instinct told me that it was by some human being.

Everything on the street was as silent as the grave. My window curtain was up, and I could see that the sky had thickened up and was very black. I did not wait for the noise to be repeated. I was just as sure that some one was in the store as if I had already seen him, and I crept softly out of bed, drew on my trousers, and moved out into the big room, having the revolver in my hand. There was no door at the head of the stairs. I intended to go there and listen down the stairway. As I was moving across the room, which was then pretty clear of goods as far as the trap-door, I suddenly recollected this opening, and changed my course to reach it. It was terribly dark in the room, and one unfamiliar with the place would not have dared to move a foot. Half way to the trap I got down on my hands and knees, and as I reached the opening, I settled down on my stomach. There was a dim light downstairs. That settled the fact that some one was in the store. After a minute I heard whispers, then the movement of feet, then a certain sound which located the intruders to a foot. They were at the safe on the front of the store. I drew myself forward and looked down the opening. I could see a lighted candle and two or three dark figures at the safe, and I could hear the combination being worked. My first thought was to drop my hand down and open fire in their direction, but I remembered that we had so many articles hanging up that no bullet had a chance of reaching to the safe. I was wondering what to do when I heard one of the men whisper:

"It's all nonsense. We might work here a week and not hit it."

"But I told you to bring the tools and you wouldn't," protested another.

"Oh, dry up!" put in a third voice. "What we want to do is to go up and bring that counter-hopper down and make him open the box."

"I'll give the cussed thing a few more trials," said the first man, and I heard him working away again. My eyes could not have told me the number of robbers, but my ears had. There were three of them, and they were no doubt desperate and determined men. They spoke of bringing me down to open the safe as if no resistance was anticipated or taken into account. Indeed, they might well reason that they had me at their mercy. The rain was now falling, the night was very dark, and a pistol shot in the store could not have been heard in either of the dwellings. If they reflected that I might be armed, they would have offset it with the fact that I was a boy of eighteen with a girl's face and probably a girl's nerve. I don't deny that I was a bit rattled, and that my lip would quiver in spite of me, but I was at the same time fully determined to protect the store if it cost me my life. How to get at the fellows was what bothered me, but that trouble was soon solved.

"There!" whispered the man at the combination as he let go of it, "I won't fool here another minute. That kid knows the combination, and we can make him work it. Come on."

They were coming upstairs. The best place for me would be at the head of the stairway. The stairs had a half turn in them, and I would fire upon the first man who came within range. I heard the men coming back to the stairway, and my nerve gave way. It wasn't from cowardice, but the knowledge that I was to kill a human being upset me. I decided to retreat to my room, and, if they persisted in coming that far, I would shoot. The trio had rubbers on their feet, but they came upstairs without trying very hard to prevent making a noise. The one who came first had the candle, and, as he got to the head of the stairs, I saw a knife in his hand. They made no delay in approaching my room, and, with a great effort, I braced myself for what I saw must happen. They could not see me until within three or four feet of the door, and their first intimation that I was out of bed was when they heard me call out:

"Stop or I'll shoot!"

I had them covered with the weapon, and for fifteen seconds there was dead silence. Then they got a plan. The man with the candle dashed it on the floor, and I suppose they meant to rush in on me in the dark, but I checkmated it by opening fire. They then either meant to retreat downstairs or toward the rear of the floor, for I saw the three together moving off and fired at their dim figures. Three seconds later there was a great shout or horror, followed by the tremendous report of the double-barreled spring gun, and then there was absolute silence. I think I stood in the door, shaking like a leaf, for fully three minutes before the silence was broken by a groan. Then it came to me that the robbers had fallen through the open door upon the cord leading to the gun.

I struck a match, lighted my own candle, and going to the opening, saw three bodies lying below. Running back to the bedroom to recharge my revolver, I then went downstairs to investigate.

It was as I suspected. The three had pitched down together. The top of one's head had been blown off by the shot, a second had a hole in his chest as big as your fist, while the third, who was responsible for the groans, was severely wounded in both legs. It was three months before he could be put on trial, and he then got four years in prison. The whole thing was a put-up job. The "drover" was a Chicago burglar called "Clawhammer Dick," and he had hidden himself in the store that night and then let his pals in by the back door. They had a horse and wagon in the rear of the building, and the plan was to rob the store of goods as well as to get at the money in the safe. A bit of carelessness on my part not only saved the store and probably my life, but wiped out a very desperate gang.

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WHISKERS CRAZE HITS CITY

Sacramento, Cal., has gone crazy on whiskers. Every one who can grow them is wearing them, from City Manager Seavey and Mayor Elkin down to the young bloods who are going in for a bobbed style. It's all on account of a whisker show, scheduled for the week of May 23-28, when a prize of \$49 will be awarded the wearer of the winning beard. Length, appearance and luxuriance of growth will be determining features.

Sacramento is preparing for a grand celebration of the days of '49, and the males have decided to wear real whiskers in emulation of the sturdy pioneers of the gold rush. The movement started among a few old timers, but now it has been taken up by the many.

And are the 150 barbers of Sacramento tearing their hair in desperation at the sudden depression in the shave market? Far from it. Instead of getting 15 cents for a chin scrape they are charging anywhere from 50 cents to \$1 for daily whisker treatments.

Mirrors in front of shops are crowded each day by men who inspect the development of their beards with hopeful interest. Goatees, Van Dykes, Smith Bros. blacks and Lord Dundrearys are developing under the watchful care of the whisker experts. Hundreds, however, have adopted no particular style, preferring to let 'em sprout to the four winds as nature directs.

The whisker growing contest had its origin in the formation of the "whiskers club," whose members, desirous of emulating the facial flora of their pioneer forebears, marched to the Post-office steps and "took the pledge" to remain "behind the brush" until the '49 celebration is over. The City Manager, Mayor and members of the City Council headed the weird procession.

PLUCK AND LUCK

NEW YORK, MAY 10, 1922

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INTERESTING ARTICLES

WILL WAIT FOR BLIND AT WHISTLE

Blind residents of Denver, Col., soon will be assured of safe passage across busy streets by means of commanding blasts on police whistles which will be furnished to them free by the city, according to Jim Goodheart, heard of the City's Department of Public Welfare. When a blind person blows his whistle, traffic officers will see that all traffic is suspended until the blind pedestrian is safely across, Goodheart said.

SMALLEST STILL

Among the many odd contrivances for manufacturing illicit beverages is one recently brought in by J. A. Roberts, Federal Prohibition enforcement officer. While searching for a still at a place some seventeen miles north of Gadsden on a place occupied by a man named Foster, a still of one-gallon capacity was captured. The composite parts of the still were a one-gallon syrup bucket, a one-pound coffee can, a 10-cent snuff box—this with a wooden stopper for the cap through which a joint of cane was thrust to be used as a worm. The outfit was neatly made and will, if preserved, be a valuable addition to some future museum.

RUM SOLD AT 33 CENTS A QUART

One hundred years ago rum sold at 2 shillings and 8 pence a quart. This price is contained in an old account book, which is among the heirlooms of Delos Hatch, Oakfield, Wis., and which was used by his grandfather at his store at Bremer's Corners, N. Y., a century ago.

The old accounts in the book are still readable, but the figures are somewhat jumbled as the accounts were written during the period when the States changed from the English style of money to the American.

Labor, according to the figures in the book, was cheap, a day's chopping having brought one customer 5 shillings in 1821, with 2 shillings extra for the use of a horse.

BIG GUNS LOST IN RIVER

Two 15-inch naval guns sank to the bottom of the Potomac River near Pope's Creek, Charles

County, Md., recently, when the barges on which they were being transported were tilted by the high wind.

The guns, which were new, had just been tested at the Government reservation at Indian Head, Md., and were being taken to Dahlgren, Va., for further testing. There were about eight or ten guns in the group, and each of them was placed on a separate barge.

The string of barges was proceeding slowly across the Potomac River when the wind, which had been blowing strongly all afternoon, became more severe. Two of the barges tilted heavily and the huge guns slid off.

LAUGHS

The Waitress—It looks as if the new boarder is going to stay. Mistress—I noticed he helped himself twice to the prunes.

Dick—I lost \$50,000 in less than half an minute last night. Fred—How did that happen? Dick—I proposed to Miss Bullion, and she said "no."

Weary—A dog is one o' the few animals that'll follow a man. Walker—Yes; one was follerin' me yesterday so fast I could hardly keep ahead of it.

Miss Foy—George was reading a book "How to Propose Without Getting Excited." Maid—Yes, Helen sent one to every young man she knew.

Little Nephew—Auntie, did you marry an Indian? Aunt—Why do you ask such silly questions, Freddy? Little Nephew—Well, I saw some scalps on your dressing table.

Teacher—If a man gets five dollars for three hours' work, what would he get if he worked ten hours a day for three days? Small Boy—He'd most likely get fired from the union.

Old Lady—Conductor, there ain't going to be a collision, I hope. Conductor—I guess not. Old Lady—I want you to be very keeful; I've got two dozen eggs in this basket.

"Nevertheless," contended the Giddy Young Bachelor, "I insist that woman is superior to man." "If you were married," chuckled the old married man, "you would simply admit it."

Johnnie, a bright boy of six years, while being fixed up for school, observing his little overcoat much the worse for wear, and having more mended places than he admired, turned quickly to his mother, and asked: "Ma, is pa rich?" "Yes, very rich, Johnnie; he is worth two millions and a half." "What in, ma?" "Oh, he values you at one million, me at one million, and baby at half a million." Johnnie, after thinking a moment, said: "Ma, tell papa to sell the baby, and buy us some clothes."

FROM ALL POINTS

STRONG WIND

"The river is so strong at times that it blows fish out of the river onto the bank," was the statement of L. V. Creel, United States Indian Service, before the Washoe Fish and Game Protective Association, Reno, Nev., recently in a plea for "runarounds" to allow fish to come up the Truckee River out of Pyramid Lake.

A shallow bar has been formed where the Tuckee River empties into the lake, due to a drop between nine and ten feet in the lake's level during the last two years.

Creel says trout attempting to reach the upper waters of the Tuckee meet with obstacles in crossing the bar and frequently are blown out of the water.

STOWAWAY NEAR DEATH

When the after hatches of the Royal Mail steamship *Orbita*, fourteen days out of Hamburg for New York, were lifted the other morning and longshoremen entered the lower hold they heard faint moans. Lying on a bale of cargo they found a nineteen-year-old boy, Fritz Ahrens of Bremen, too weak and emaciated to speak. They summoned Capt. Matthews and Dr. F. R. Lucas, the ship's surgeon. The boy was taken to the ship's hospital and partly revived.

Hardly able to speak and only in a whisper, the boy told the doctor that he crept into the hold at Hamburg as a stowaway, not thinking he would be battened down. He had a little food and water which lasted, he thought, four days. For the last ten days he suffered from hunger and thirst and two days ago lay down on a bale to die.

A FISHERMEN'S SHACK

High and dry on the beach at Cordova, Alaska, there is an old hull, sometimes used by fishermen as a shanty, which once was the \$10,000 yacht *Restless*, owned by Dr. R. N. Gordon of Seattle.

For eight years the *Restless*, after being purchased by the United States National Forest Service from Dr. Gordon, was used to cruise along Alaska shores and suffered damage several times. In 1911 a storm drove the boat on the rocks, ripping a hole in her hull; in 1914 an explosion in her stern gasoline tank wrecked the after end, and later the boat, while in Esther Passage, collided head-on with a sleeping whale. The *Restless* was so disabled she was towed to Cordova and beached.

Becoming unseaworthy, she was dismantled and advertised for sale. A fisherman bought the hull for \$15 and it is now used as bachelor's quarters.

MISSING HEIRESS FOUND

Living in rather poor circumstances at Shamrock, a coke town near Brownsville, Pa., Mrs. Ellen Chappell McCaffrey, heir to more than \$10,000, has been located through the medium of a local newspaper.

Mrs. McCaffrey declared that, although she still remembered the large sum left her by her father, she had virtually given up hope of ever

receiving the inheritance, as the last she had heard a trustee had disappeared with the funds. She says that she will make immediate preparations for a trip to England to claim the fortune.

Mrs. McCaffrey's husband, Johnnie, has been employed at Shamrock for a number of years. About two years ago he sustained an injury to his knee, and for about a year received compensation. At present he is attempting to support his wife and one son, aged ten, on a wage of \$2 a day.

PYTHONS EASILY TAKEN

In the Maley Peninsula quite a little industry has recently sprung up among planters and others whose business takes them into the jungle.

The snakes used for the purpose of making shoes are mostly pythons, and these are usually caught by coolies in the ordinary course of their work or on expeditions specially organized to search for them.

The python has a beautiful marked skin, is easy to capture, and attains a great size, being found up to thirty feet in length.

The coolies are paid so much per foot for live specimens, dead ones being useless, as the reptile has to be skinned immediately after it is killed to obtain the best results.

All that is required to effect the capture of even the largest of these snakes is a forked stick, a noose and a stout pole.

When he sights his victim the coolie approaches and places the forked stick behind the back of the head and pins the animal to the ground. A noose is then slipped over the head and the snake usually most obligingly winds itself around the pole and is carried back to more civilized quarters, where it is sold to the "curer."

Pythons are most voracious feeders, and if found, as is usual, after a meal, may be handled with impunity.

Occasionally, however, a very different customer obtrudes himself upon the scene—the King Cobra. The contempt felt for the python quickly gives place to the extremest caution when facing one of these deadly inhabitants of the jungle.

The King Cobra attains a length of from 15 to 20 feet, and will attack a man without provocation. It is seldom caught alive, as the skin is valueless, but I have seen one caught in the way I have described. This specimen was 17 feet in length, and it took three men to carry it. If a man is bitten by one of these snakes, death results within 10 minutes.

Strange tales are told by natives of pythons from 60 feet to 70 feet in length that have been known to devour a rhinoceros, but they may be taken as legendary.

Jungle pigs, however, frequently fall victims to the python, and I was recently told by a Malay that he saw one in the jungle with a medium sized pig half way into its mouth.

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PLUCK AND LUCK

GOOD READING

MUSKRATS BURROW THROUGH BANKS TO ESCAPE

Muskrats trapped under the ice in the reservoir that supplies the Borough of Railroad, York County, Pa., have drained off all the water by burrowing through the banks to escape.

This, at least, is the theory of those who investigated when it was found that the reservoir was dry. It is believed that the last heavy freeze imprisoned several muskrats in the reservoir and that the heavy snow that fell immediately afterward caused the animals to burrow for freedom below the water level.

Families that depended on the reservoir for their household supply of water have been compelled to turn temporarily to wells and springs.

BONDS IN COAL BIN

The corner of a Liberty bond protruding from the door of the stove into which he was shoveling coal led to the discovery by R. A. Mitchell, railroad agent at Waterlick, Va., of about \$75,000 in bonds, concealed in the station coal bin.

Some of the bonds were registered in the name of officials of the Grottoes (Va.) State Bank and part, at least, of the cache was believed to represent loot obtained from that institution when it was robbed June 30, 1921.

Two-thirds of the bonds recovered were registered, the remainder being railroad and industrial issues. Mitchell said he had been scooping up "papers" with the coal for several days, and he was speculating the other day as to what may have been the intrinsic cost of the station fire during the recent cold spell.

LONG HOG DRIVE IN SNOW

Jesse Speck, a rancher in the Big Bad Lands, South Dakota, has just completed a hog drive that is likely to stand as a record for some time.

He started from his ranch with 200 hogs in prime condition, to drive them to this town for shipment. As the roads were in bad condition from drifted snow, and the distance to Scenic is 35 miles, Speck had difficulty in getting the necessary number of cowboys to turn hog drivers, but he finally got started.

The drive required ten days, through almost insurmountable obstacles, and when the one-time prize hogs arrived here they were hungry, thin, sick and nearly frozen.

Speck and his helpers had found it necessary to continually prod, push, coax, bully and plead with the unwilling porkers to make time. Hogs which averaged 200 pounds on starting weighed in on arrival here at less than an average of 125 pounds.

FINDS OUR STAMPS FAULTY

Criticism of the methods of printing United States stamps has been voiced by Fred J. Melville, one of England's leading postage stamp authorities, in connection with the recent discovery of the forgeries of the two-cent red issue.

These forgeries were detected quickly, and it is doubted that any were used for letter postage.

"Most collectors," said Mr. Melville, "have noticed the wide variations in the United States stamps of recent years, due to the experimenting at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing with new processes of printing. Stamps of like design and denomination have been printed from finely engraved steel plates, from rotary recess plates, from surface printing plates and by the offset method, and these have been in circulation simultaneously. The different qualities of impression make them all look different, and this is a dangerous state of affairs in a country whose stamps are being used to the extent of millions every day.

"Where the genuine stamps vary so much it is difficult to detect or even suspect a forgery, and it is not surprising that some one has taken advantage of the recent confusion in stamp printing in the United States. There are wide avenues for the disposal of the forged stamps in the countless mail-order firms in America. This is, however, the first forgery of a current United States stamp since 1894."

OLD WOMAN TRAPPER PERISHES IN MIRE

An aged woman who had been a trapper for a lifetime died a terrible death in the St. Clair flats, Michigan, when, with a steeltrap fast to her arm, she tried to wade to help, only to be mired in the soft mud. She struggled against the grip of the slime that slowly sucked her down until, waist deep, she died of exhaustion.

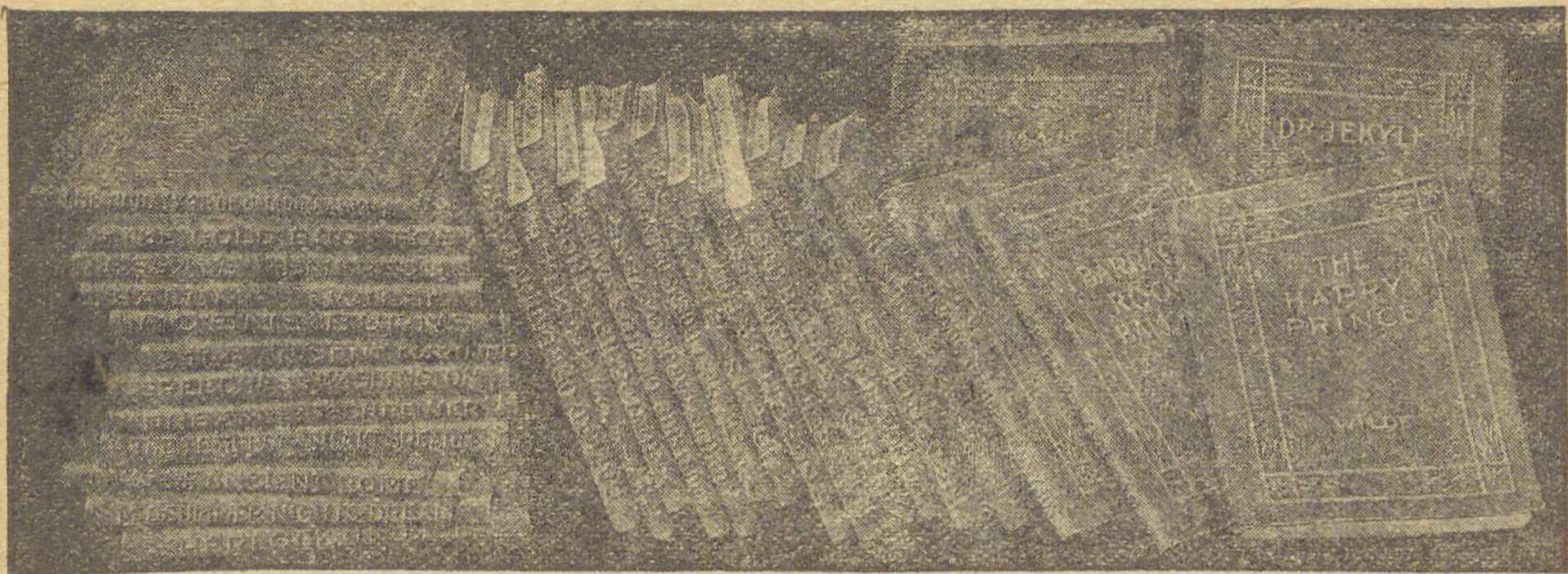
Searching parties reached her too late and today she was buried in this little community where for fifty years she had held her own with rod and trap. Her name was Mrs. Harriet Sears and she was 72 years old.

Several days ago Mrs. Sears left her flats home in a duck boat to trap muskrat and mink. She did not return in the evening and a search was made for her. Her body lay close to shore, sunk to the waist in the oozy channel bottom when the searchers reached her next morning. Gripped around her right arm was a large steel muskrat trap. It was apparent that her arm had become caught in the trap while she was in the duck boat. She had left the boat and had got to shallow water a few feet from shore when she began to sink.

It was evident that her losing struggle to release herself, aggravated by the pain from the cruel teeth of the trap, had brought the mercy of exhaustion and then death.

In the flats section the woman as well as the men are expert trappers and fish hunters and Mrs. Sears for years had gone out alone in her duck boat to lay her traps. She was one of the best known pioneers of the flats section.

Send us a one-cent stamp to cover postage, and we will mail you a copy of "Mystery Magazine."



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In this advertisement, naturally, it is impossible for us to show you a sample volume. The best we can do is to describe and picture the books in the limited space of this page. We depend on your faith in the statements made by the advertisements appearing in "Moving Picture Stories," and we are hoping you will believe what we say, instead of thinking this offer is "too good to be true."

What This Offer Is

Here, then, is our offer. The illustration above shows thirty of the world's greatest masterpieces of literature. These include the finest works of such immortal authors as Shakespeare, Kipling, Stevenson, Emerson, Poe, Coleridge, Burns, Omar Khayyam, Macaulay, Lincoln, Washington, Oscar Wilde, Gilbert, Longfellow, Drummond, Conan Doyle, Edward Everett Hale, Thoreau, Tennyson, Browning, and others. These are books which no one cares to confess he has not read and reread—books which bear reading a score of times.

Each of these volumes is complete—this is not that abomination, a collection of extracts; the paper is a high-grade white wove antique, equal to that used in books selling at \$1.50 to \$2.00; the type is clear and easy to read; the binding is a beautiful limp material, tinted in antique copper and green, and so handsomely embossed as to give it the appearance of hand-tooled leather.

And, though each of these volumes is complete (the entire set contains over 3,000 pages), a volume can be carried conveniently wherever you go, in your pocket or purse; several can be placed in your hand-bag or grip, or the entire thirty can be placed on your library table "without cluttering it up" as one purchaser expressed it.

What About the Price?

Producing such fine books is, in itself, no great achievement. But the aim of this enterprise has been to produce them at a price that anyone in the whole land could afford. The only way we could do this was to manufacture them in quantities of nearly a million at a time—to bring the price down through "quantity production." And we relied, for our sales, on our faith that Americans would rather read classics than trash. What happened? **OVER TEN MILLION** of these volumes have already been purchased by people in every walk of life.

Yet we know,

from our daily mail, that many thousands of people still cannot believe we can sell thirty such volumes for \$2.98 (plus postage). We do not know how to combat this skepticism. All we can say is: Send for these thirty volumes; if you are not satisfied, return them at any time within a month and you will not be out one penny. Of the thousands of readers who purchased this set, not one in a hundred asked for a refund.

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